



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>





11



BEEF, IRON AND WINE



Beef, Iron and Wine

By
Jack Lait



Garden City New York
Doubleday, Page & Company
1916

Copyright, 1916, by
DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & COMPANY

*All rights reserved, including that of
translation into foreign languages,
including the Scandinavian*



COPYRIGHT, 1915, 1916, J. KEELEY
COPYRIGHT, 1916, BY THE CROWELL PUBLISHING COMPANY

CONTENTS

	PAGE
Introduction by J. Keeley, Editor of the Chicago <i>Herald</i>	ix
1. The Septagon	3
2. "Charlie the Wolf"	
I. Was "Wanted" by Kelly and Kier- nan so They Found Him Taking the Air.	19
II. In Honest Air, Far From His Lair, Finds the Fire Escape All Wrong.	25
III. In New Haunts Nestles in Feathers; Has Bounties Served on Platters.	32
IV. Gets by With It Enjoying Bankroll in Peace; "Let 'Im Go," says Kiernan to Kelly	36
V. Kelly and Kiernan Go Toy Slum- ming; Encounter an Old Friend; Watchdogs and Wolf Meet Over Lambs	41
VI. Boy Has to Break Law to Get a Look, Says Charlie the Wolf.	

	PAGE
Why Not Some Notice for Good Boys?	46
VII. On Preparedness for the Higher Life. Deplores Roughneck in Refined Work	52
VIII. At the Ball Park Meets the Thirsty Dicks. Opens Up About a Game of Long Ago	58
3. Felice o' the Follies	67
4. Lars, the Useless, Was a Nuisance, so He Got a Public Office and Threw His Love to the Birds	81
5. If a Party Meet a Party	91
6. Omaha Slim	
I. Heard Nature Calling Him and Thought of His Mother Till Work and Fortune Fell His Way. . .	105
II. Political Philosophy Indorsed by Luke the Dude. Election a System or Guessing Game? . . .	112
III. Sniffs Scented Breezes of Lazy, Languorous Spring. Poet Within Him Answers as Befits	118
IV. On International Crisis: Soldier or	

Contents

vii

PAGE

Citizen? If All Go Fighting, Who'll Be Voting?	123
7. Jennie, The Imp of the Night, Begg Bread No More—But Mike Will Soon Be Big Enough	133
8. Taxi, Mister!	143
9. The Canada Kid	
I. On Bad Boy Problem, Heredity or Environment? Tells How Team- ster's Boy Went Wrong	159
II. Finds a Queer Oasis in Dry, Rural Desert, and Brings Back a Trophy to Prove It	164
III. The Kid Looks 90 Days in the Face, but Justice Triumphs. Virtue Gets Its Just for Dessert	169
IV. Hails Crafty Comrade	174
V. Only One to a Customer	179
VI. Loses His Jewel and Sorrows Bit- terly. Gives Epigrams of Love and Life	184
10. Second From the End	193
11. Heritage of the Suffering Brother. The Blushing Yokel Who Always Got the Bitter Leavings	213

	PAGE
12. One Touch of Art	221
13. It Wasn't Honest, but It Was Sweet to Save the Dimes; The Secret of the Little Tin Bank	241
14. Ten Dollars' Worth	249
15. The Gangster's Elegy	263
16. Pics	277
17. Annye's Ma	297

INTRODUCTION

In announcing Jack Lait as a new contributor the *American Magazine* called him "The Human Arabian Nights." A pat, illuminating phrase, for he has One Thousand and One ideas and rarely two alike. Lait is a marvel to those who work with him. His versatility—even mechanically—is wonderful. To those who read his output in the Chicago *Herald* of 75,000 words each month divided into from 30 to 35 stories, each with a plot, a theme, cameo-cut characters, seductive introductions and crashing climaxes, that versatility must appeal; to those who write it is little short of marvellous.

I do not, however, believe fecundity plus originality, plus power of expression, plus the artful art of suspense are the real elements of Lait's success. I always think of him as the Human X-ray. He is the interpreter of the subcutaneous of life. He seems to divine in all manner of folks the exact emotions which generate there. He surprises, even embarrasses us, often, by his frank, plain exposition of what we have

been thinking, and what we have been thinking no one knew we were thinking.

And Lait not only sees below the surface but also illuminates the little things which really are the big things of life. He analyzes the very commonplace, and we wonder why we have found no novelty in that which is old. He sings the songs of the unsung, finds pathos in the ludicrous struggler, and comedy in the pompous proud. Nothing is sacred to him except his sympathies.

Lait as a reporter equalled the best. To-day, in his new environment, he is still a reporter—the reporter of human emotions—a super-craftsman.

From “boss” to office boy we in the office where Jack pounds his typewriter salute his maiden book. And we all feel a certain amount of pride in being allowed to bask in the glory that will come from its success. For we know Jack Lait.

J. KEELEY.

Editor of the Chicago *Herald*.



I
THE SEPTAGON





I

THE SEPTAGON

ALEC was a rookie reporter—but that was long ago. Alec is smart. Now Alec owns flat buildings.

Alec had scarcely worn the nickel plate off his star before he came upon a chance to make money. That is, he had the same chance that anybody had to make money, only he had just found it out. What he found out was what older and wiser heads knew—that if you have something that somebody else wants, that somebody else will buy that something, and pay you in coin. The “goods” is mighty. The market for the goods doesn’t fluctuate much.

What Alec found out, to be specific, was that if he could construct dramatic stories, or correlate interesting incidents with sequence, a moving-picture company would pay him for them if he presented them written on one side of the paper. Because he worked for a newspaper he met a movie director; the director opened the heavens for Alec by telling him

that if he had any stories that were unusual, bright, or compelling, he, the director, would prevail upon the company to pay him, the reporter, commensurate moneys for such stories.

Alec went forth into the day with a fortune staring him in the face. It had never been put to him just that way before. He had always thought, if he had thought of it at all, that fellows who wrote for the screen, and who got lots of money for it, no doubt, were especially inspired or especially trained, or—well, anyway, they were especial. But now it was as clear as glue—anybody could do it.

He let his secret out to Billings. Billings was an old-time newspaper man who had been at it so long that he went home when he was through instead of hanging around waiting for the first edition to come up, so he could see what they had done with his copy and how it looked in type. Billings rolled his own cigarettes and never carried a cane. Billings didn't look a bit surprised when Alec told him. Billings said the director was probably quite right—go to it.

"But where do I get these dramas, these unusual stories?" asked Alec.

"Ah," said Billings, "that's the trick! No, that

isn't the trick, either. It's no trick to get stories. But here's the trick—to see them."

"I don't even see your argument," said Alec.

Billings had a story to do, but he turned from his typewriter with resignation.

"The world," said Billings, "is alive with wonderful, untold drama and pathos and tragedy and comedy and romance and moving-picture scenarios. Like love, you don't have to seek it all over the New York Central—it's camping at the foot of your domestic radiator, which would be the modern parallel, I believe, for the classic hearthstone. Stories never grow better, nor worse. In fact, they never shift except as to choice or chance of characters to make them or be made in them. Some wise-cracking copy-reader of olden days said there were only seven original plots. Those seven plots have been woven into seven hundred thousand million stories—there must have been as many as that—I wrote nearly that many myself.

"Now then, like the Swiss battleships, where are they? Everywhere, I believe I said was the correct answer. They are wherever you can see them, if you have the sight. Develop that look. You may find something, because it's there—there it is—and

there—and there—and over there. Drama is all around you. So is farce. So is a working out of every one of those seven plots.

“You can find a story in a street-car conductor, or a toothpick sharpener, or a waitress with one eye, or a loan shark with his eye on one thing, or a tinsmith, or a rich man’s only and owing son. He, or she, or any of them, is mixed up in one of those seven plots. He has to be. There are only seven. He can’t get out of one—except to stumble into another. So, as I said before, go to it.”

It wasn’t very convincing to Alec. But he knew Billings was a reporter beyond doubting, and what he said might be right. So he set forth in search of his drama, come it in any of its seven varieties, none of which he could have recognized, branded, or roped at sight, and none of which he had ever surprised camping on his radiator.

Scarcely outside the office door he saw a crippled woman dragging past. He quickened. Drama might be there. He followed her. It was a new game, this being a drama detective. He noticed that she was old and disgustingly lame and needlessly dirty, and said “G’ blesh you” monotonously, and profaned under her breath those too busy or too

stingy or too lazy or too cagey to cross her palm with silver.

That was no drama. Maybe Billings could find a story there. But Alec told himself he would be good and gosh-danged if he could see two reels in the old wench.

It was about going-home time for the rabble. Alec glanced out into the street and saw a car go by. It had seats for seventy and it carried one hundred and sixty. The boys and women and girls and men were rammed in like short filler in a long stogie.

"Home must look pretty good to the common people to make 'em want it as bad as that," said Alec silently. "It's a shame at that! But there's no story in it—you don't have to go to a theatre to see that. People go to a theatre to get away from such as that. The papers have even quit writing editorials about it, it's so old and so cold. I'd dare Billings or anybody else to find any high spots in that crowd of tired *hoi polloi* fighting for a spot to stand to get to their corned beef and cabbage, or *gefuellte* fish or *lachs* and *schinken*, or whatever the poor devils eat. No—nothing there."

So he turned away. The street car had passed, anyway.

Alec strolled to the corner. He saw a big, fat boy with a bundle of newspapers under his arm stop there and offer his sports extras for sale. A dirty lad half his size walked up and said:

“Git off o’ my corner.”

“Go awn,” said the big boy, and he pushed the little one down on his face, while his papers flew out and into the muddy street.

The mite picked himself up. In his eyes flashed the vindictive passion of Sicilian ancestry. He reached into the gutter and picked up half a brick. The big boy stood complacently laughing as the little fellow, with his face drawn hard, walked steadily toward him. The big boy drew back his ponderous foot to kick him but the little street-rat, with scarce a swing, let fly the ragged piece of brick. It struck the big boy on the forehead, and he stumbled and fell.

The baby walked over, picked up his piece of brick, and stood over the fallen bully, ready to wallop him again if need be. The bruised and prostrate youth worked himself over to the curb and sat holding his head with pain. The little chap picked up what papers of his were still salable and what papers the other one had dropped as he fell, took position

within an inch of the whimpering enemy on the walk and called "Extra—'Nother Italian Victory."

"Oh," said Alec to himself, "that might go if we had had a camera right here to take it on the spot. But that isn't plot. A couple of thieving little news kids fighting for a place to sell yellow rot at a cent a sensation isn't a scenario. Kids are kid-stuff, anyhow. And, talking of kidding, I guess Billings was having a little fun with me."

And he whistled and looked about.

Toward him up the street came one of the many, unknown but familiar, unidentified but marked for identification. She wasn't twenty, but her youth was long ago. She raised her eye ever so little and held his eye ever so long with it. She waited. Alec pulled a hard, Scotch smile that didn't miss much of being a hard, Scotch sneer. Her eye dropped. The girl moved on.

"The movies," mused Alec, "come under the head of the newest profession. There is nothing new in the oldest profession. There's nothing left to write about that sort, and it's dirty business at best."

She moved along and Alec turned and watched her as many men like him have watched girls like her, not with sympathy nor with desire, but with curiosity.

Out of a shadowed doorway slunk a male figure. He looked up and down and then stepped out and overtook the girl and shifted into step with her. She looked up into his hard face. He spoke a word or two. Then she sneakingly opened her purse and took from it a crumpled bill and passed it into his hand dangling at his side. He gave it a sideways look without bending his head and shoved it into his pocket. Then he hurried along, leaving the girl, walking with measured strides, to take up her sodden trade again.

"That's one," whispered Alec without speaking, "that the censors would come out to meet and the people in theatres don't want to see or know anything about. Fugh—me for the pleasant things of life! They smell better and they sell better."

And he strolled along.

Past him, hurrying, came a young man, clean and virile, sober and upright. Alec saw him almost run as he drew near the girl. He reached her and touched her elbow from behind. The girl swung sharply on her heel, saw who it was, and flushed beneath her rouge.

Alec took a quick step and listened.

"You broke your promise, Alice," said the young man. "I waited all night."

The girl shook her head, a bit sadly, Alec thought, but definitely and decisively.

"We'll forget it all, honey," said the young man. "Yes, I can. I don't care what you've been. You're my——"

"No, I'm not," said she.

The young man's face showed pain. He bent closer and spoke so low that Alec could scarcely hear.

"The baby, dearie," he said, and it was almost a sob; "the baby—he cries for you."

The girl's eyes softened and she started to reach with her hand toward the arm of the young man. But just then she glanced about and saw, behind a pillar of the elevated railroad structure, the malignant face of the man who had taken her money. Her hand stopped. It grew limp and fell loosely to her side.

"I can't, Billy," she said. "It's too late."

And she turned and walked on, up the street—slowly.

The man behind the pillar turned gradually and followed her in a semicircle with his steely eyes. The young man stood paralyzed and followed her in a straight line down her crooked way with eyes that were moist and soft and wonderfully sad. Alec

followed her with cold and unlighted eyes a moment, then turned completely around and walked back to the office.

"That's a rotten triangle," he said to himself. "There'll be a story there some day, with an angle in the coroner's office, sure. But it's the same old elemental mix-up. If I wrote that the director would chuck me through a window. Guess this isn't my day."

Alec found Billings rolling a cigarette into brown paper till it was finished and looked like a strudel. Then he caught his eye.

"Hello, Jason," said Billings. "Bring home the bacon?"

And Alec told him in detail what he had seen in his hour. Billings listened. When Alec finished he looked up and said:

"Which one are you going to write first?"

"None," said Alec. "That street-corner stuff is dead wood. I don't see anything in it to write."

Billings lit his cigarette.

"You didn't find much, I'll admit," said he. "You were gone sixty minutes, and in that sixty minutes you have circumscribed the entire septagon of human emotions. You have been an eyewitness and an

eavesdropper to the seven primary plots of all classic narratives, expositions, diatribes, sonnets, jeremiads, psalms, plays, novels, short stories, poems, odes, epics, and librettos from Solomon and Sophocles to George Randolph Chester and William Randolph Hearst. You have tramped the dramatic geography from "The Mysteries of Paris" to the blisteries of Jack London and the irresisteries of Irving Berlin.

"You didn't see much. Let me, like a reporter when setting out a story, list for you the events of the day as you have seen them pass in review. Need and Greed, Courage and Fear, Vice and Sacrifice, and the ace of trumps, Love.

"You couldn't find a story there. Shakespeare took the same combination and built 'The Merchant of Venice.' Dickens took the same combination and built 'Oliver Twist.' O. Henry took the same combination and wrote himself into heaven.

"You saw the modern prototype of Lazarus. You saw David slay the newsboy Goliath. You saw the Magdalen, and you did not bid her rise, and you, who were not without sin, cast the first sneer. You saw Bill Sikes and you saw Nancy. You saw Camille and you saw Sappho and Carmen and Katinka Maslova, and the rag and the bone and the hank of hair, and

Anne of Austria and Little Nell, and you heard Elsie Ferguson in 'Outcast.'

"With beginners' luck you threw a seven the first roll and with beginners' blindness you didn't read the dice.

"You saw the seven wonders of the world of the soul and you saw the seven souls of the world's wonder.

"And you saw nothing.

"You started out after a two-reel drama and you saw a too-real drama."

"Here," said Alec. "I asked you to help me and all that, but I don't think you talk very decently to me. I don't know where you get that stuff to bawl me out like that."

"Never mind that," said Billings. "Tell you what. You write a scenario about a blind man looking for a heap of garbage to skim, and have him find seven hills of gold. Make him a jibbering, jabbering jackass who has heard about the seven gold-mine-containing mountains, but who never believed a word of it. Give him a wise old prospector who has been finding gold for tenderfoots and plug-hat promoters all his life, but who never could dig any ore for himself. Have the wise old rummy lead the blind gink

and give him the gold to feel—to taste—to smell—have him finally grow out of patience and throw a nugget of it at the blind man's head. The nugget hits his head and, since gold against ivory clinks, let the blind duffer show some interest at that stage. Leave him still skeptical, suspicious, insolent, and ungrateful until a rich dealer in precious metals comes by and offers him a million for the mine. Then have the blind man hit the wise old guide over the head with his staff, take the money, and live happily ever after—that is, as happily as a blind man can live, for he remains just as blind as ever, since his blindness is constitutional—inherited, maybe—and hopeless.”

Alec raised his eyes as Billings came up for air.

“Say,” said Alec, “that’s a great story! By Lucifer, I’ll just write that for that picture fellow!”

“Sure, write it,” said Billings. “Call it ‘None so Blind He Cannot Hear.’”

And Alec did.

And it was a huge hit.

And the director said he had “discovered” a bear-cat; and engaged Alec at once, for famous compensation.

And now and then Alec passes by his old office and

looks out of his limousine and sees Billings buttoning up his coat collar as he starts out to cover a drunken murder or a temperance rally, for Billings is still a reporter and regarded as one of the best on the paper.




II

"CHARLIE THE WOLF"

- I. WAS WANTED**
- II. IN HONEST AIR**
- III. NESTLES IN FEATHERS**
- IV. GETS BY WITH IT**
- V. GOES TOY SLUMMING**
- VI. BOY HAS TO BREAK THE LAW**
- VII. ON PREPAREDNESS**
- VIII. AT THE BALL PARK**





II

"CHARLIE THE WOLF"

I

WAS WANTED

FOR five days and nights Kelly and Kiernan, the prize front-office detectives, were hunting Charlie the Wolf. Charlie was a burglar. He had been out of Joliet three weeks, had made his visit to headquarters, and was expected to stick his head in every week or so and give an account of himself. He hadn't been seen since the first trip.

The Chief had ordered a roundup of all the old-timers, anyhow. And, besides, the front office always was more or less nervous when Charlie was at large. Stealing was the only business he had ever followed, and the fact that he was eating was evidence enough that he had been stealing. He had just finished a four-year sentence and served it out. He wasn't paroled. Nobody ever thought of paroling Charlie the Wolf.

It had been his fourth "stretch" in Joliet, following

two at the reformatory in Pontiac and one in the Chicago bridewell. Before he ever had seen the inside of a cell, which was when he was fifteen, he had been a bad boy, with bad antecedents.

It always had been easy to find the Wolf before.

All that had to be done was to find Kitty Cole—and Kitty always left a trail that was broad and crimson.

But Kitty was dead. She had made her last visit to the Wolf a month before he was released.

They say that when Charlie got word from the inside that Kitty was dying it took four guards to hold him.

Now, then, what had become of him in those three weeks since he came back to Chicago?

Kelly and Kiernan had questioned every thief and "squealer" in the town and nobody had seen him. The saloons knew him not. The cigar store where he played stush of old had not won him back.

"It must be another woman," said Kelly to Kiernan.

"Yes—a quiet one this time," said Kiernan to Kelly.

No good burglaries had been reported in the time the Wolf had prowled at liberty. There were one

or two cheap ones, but any one who knew anything knew the Wolf was no piker. And he hadn't left town, most likely. Chicago always had been the sole field of his art, and it wasn't probable the Wolf had changed his spots.

"It's funny," said Kelly to Kiernan.

"He's layin' low, framin' a big job somewhere," said Kiernan to Kelly.

An inspiration seized the Chief. He called in Kelly and Kiernan.

"Rums," said the Chief. "Where's Kitty Cole buried?"

"I don't know," said Kelly and Kiernan.

"Find out," said the Chief. "And watch that grave. That's where you'll nail the Wolf."

They started out.

"Sounds pretty good," said Kelly to Kiernan.

"We're a fine pair o' dicks," said Kiernan to Kelly.

They found Kitty's grave in Calvary.

Nobody had been near it the attendant of that section reported.

The detectives watched for three days and nobody came near it. They reported back to the chief.

"We'll find him—somewhere," said Kelly and Kiernan to the Chief.

The detectives put in extra hours. They watched railroad stations, pawnshops, questionable apartment houses, night-owl restaurants, and even the hop joints, although the Wolf, unlike many of his breed, never had been a habitu  of the opium lounges.

Again they reported:

"We can't find hide nor hair of the Wolf. He's prob'ly turned square and dropped out a sight," said Kelly and Kiernan to the Chief.

"Go on," said the Chief to Kelly and Kiernan. "If he come in here right this minute he'd probably go out with a diamond necklace."

It was a beastly situation for the detectives.

The Chief wouldn't take them off the assignment and they had exhausted every possible avenue of logical search.

It was Sunday. Sunday is like any other day to detectives. So they reported at headquarters as usual and went forth ostensibly to seek the Wolf, but actually to loaf.

It had gotten down to a game of endurance between them and the Chief. If he insisted on keeping Kelly and Kiernan hunting for a man who couldn't be found, they couldn't argue with him. But, as there was no place left to look for him, and they had to be

somewhere, they went anywhere and put in their idle time as best it entertained them.

It was a fine Sunday. The sun was shining and the air was balmy.

"Let's go to Lincoln Park," said Kelly to Kiernan.

"And look at the other monkeys, huh?" said Kiernan to Kelly.

To Lincoln Park they went. They strolled up the roads and over the lawns to the zoo. They saw the elephants and the zebras and the boa constrictors and walked over to the lion house and there, standing before a cage in which the king of beasts paced up and down, stood Charlie the Wolf.

"Pipe," said Kelly to Kiernan.

"Cinch," said Kiernan to Kelly.

They walked up, one from each side, and each gripped an arm.

"Hello," said the Wolf.

"We want you," said Kelly.

"Been layin' for you for five days," said Kiernan.

"Why didn't you come here in the first place?" asked Charlie. "The place to find the Wolf is in the zoo, ain't it?"

"Nix on the comedy," said Kelly.

"Whaddaya doin' here, anyhow?" said Kiernan.

"I'll tell you what I'm doin' here," said the Wolf. "See dat lion? Well, it's Sunday. He's caged in dere like I used to be caged in. And on Sunday it always useta seem harder den what it was any odder day. Dey lock ye in on Saturday night an' dere ye stay till Mundy mornin'."

"The lion?" asked Kelly.

"No—the Wolf," said Charlie. "So I come up here to take a look at me frien' and brudder, de lion. Ye know, it kind o' hypped me from de start. But de las' t'ree days it's been even closer to me.

"Ye see de way dat lion is gnawin' at dem bars an' de way he's growlin'? You t'ink he's swearin', don't ye? Well, he ain't."

"What is he doin'?" asked Kelly.

"He's singin', I suppose," said Kiernan.

"No—he's cryin'," said the Wolf. "T'ree days ago dat lion's lioness croaked. And dey drags her away right in front o' his cage. An' dey tells me it took four keepers to hold 'im."

"Come on," said Kelly to the Wolf.

"De chief wants to see ye," said Kiernan to the Wolf.

"Good luck, old lifer," said the Wolf to the lion.

II

IN HONEST AIR

Charlie the Wolf, "honor man" and four-time alumnus of the state bastille, thought it all over after he had paid a friendly visit to the ex-warden—the man who had given him the honor button, who had let him work outdoors the last six months of his last prison "stretch," and who had asked him to go on the level and keep out of trouble.

The Wolf had not been quite honest since he was turned loose to prowl. He had cut himself down to one burglary a week, which was almost like being on the honesty wagon with him, and a new temptation was gnawing at him—he wanted to try being really honest, something he had never known since he started running away with customers' change when he was a newsboy at the age of eight.

"I'll give it a tumble," said the Wolf.

First of all he had to cut away from his associates, who were always finding "soft spots" and inviting him in on burglaries. So he disappeared.

He went out into a residence district and got him-

self a room in a three-story house, on the second story. If he couldn't do second-story work he could at least be on familiar ground.

There was a store downstairs—a jewelry store. He passed by it the first morning and as he looked in, through force of habit, he saw a little man busying himself about. The Wolf looked at him twice, then he slunk away. The man was Barney Hein, a “fence” whom the Wolf had known in the good old days.

What was he doing here? Had Barney, too, “turned square” and come out of the busy centre to live a decent life?

Maybe.

The Wolf turned back to look again and he saw a man stealthily enter. The Wolf saw a number standing clearly before his eyes, and felt a rush of prison memories. The visitor to Barney the Fence was Joe Gallagher, a pickpocket with whom he had served two terms.

“That settles it,” said the Wolf to himself. “I thought for a minute Barney might ‘a’ quit. But Joe is a dip in his heart. Barney’s out here under cover. I guess I moved in the wrong house.”

The Wolf walked around the block and made up his mind to take his bag and move. He came in the

back way. As he passed the rear door of the first floor a woman, dressed screamingly, painted gaudily, and carrying herself as no one who knew could mistake, swished past him.

"Blond Clara," said the Wolf to himself. "A shoplifter from the year 1. What 'm I into?"

He walked up to his flat and started down the hall for his room. He had engaged it from a motherly old woman who said she had one son who worked nights. In the kitchen the Wolf ran plump into the son, and immediately knew the sort of night work it was. The son was Ned Navarre, the nifty faro dealer who could do more things with a deck of wrong cards than Herman the Great could with a plug hat.

The Wolf entered his room and began to pack up. This was no place for a man who had come to get honest air. The police wouldn't believe him on oath anyway, any time, and if they ever found him in this honeycomb of vice, sin, and crime they would put him away just on general principles. He must make haste and "beat it."

The Wolf heard a heavy step on the stairs. Then he heard two voices in conversation with Ned's old lady. The Wolf didn't have to hold his palm to his

ear. The voices were those of Kelly and Kiernan, the chief's front office pussy-foot stars.

The police were inquiring after Benny the Bear, a daylight holdup man who was reputed to be living in the apartment. The woman told them Benny had moved away three days ago, and had occupied that middle room. That middle room was where the Wolf was standing.

He knew Kelly and Kiernan would be in there in a minute, and if they found him—good-night. He flashed the room in a glance and stepped out of the window to a fire escape. He had his bag in his hand. He pulled the shade down from outside and started down the escape, but found it was "blind," with no stairs or steps leading to the ground. The jump was long and the Wolf wouldn't chance it.

He heard Kelly and Kiernan come in and talk as they looked around.

"What's that?" said Kelly to Kiernan.

"A picture of Kitty Cole," said Kiernan to Kelly. "You know who she is, don't you?"

"Who she was you mean," said Kelly to Kiernan. "She was Charlie the Wolf's girl."

"How'd I come to leave out that picture?" said the Wolf to himself on the fire escape.

The detectives shouted for the old woman and cross-questioned her for ten minutes. The Wolf stood out on the fire escape, his teeth chattering in a driving wind and drowning rain. The old woman said she had not seen Charlie the Wolf, nor did she know him. The room had been occupied by a man who said he was a Pullman conductor on a vacation. But he had left the day before. The detectives laughed at her, but let it go at that and went away.

The Wolf heard the downstairs door slam. Then he crawled back into the room, picked up the forgotten picture, kissed it, and slipped it into his black bag. Then he started for the front door. The old lady intercepted him.

"Here," she said, "you owe a dollar and a quarter room rent—you can't get away like that."

"Don't be childish," said the Wolf. "Gimme the up an' down. Did ye ever see a guy as wet as I am?"

"What's that got to do with my room rent?" yelled Ned's mother.

"Only this," said the Wolf. "In a joint as crooked as this the fire escapes oughta be covered, heated, an' furnished.

And he brushed past her and went back to the district where his presence was no surprise and involved no peril.

III

NESTLES IN FEATHERS

Charlie the Wolf, burglar and honor man, again decided that honesty was the best policy in the metropolitan life.

Though his first venture at leaving his natural fastnesses had been ungrateful and null, the Wolf decided he would once more slink from his lair into the wide open and take his chances with the lambs and the hunters in alien fields.

The Wolf packed his bag, taking with him his little wardrobe, his bull's-eye lantern, and his chisel.

"If I get a job that jimmy might be useful," he mused. "And if I have to live in a new place the flasher might help me find my way home in the dark."

Into the heart of the Ghetto he went and found asylum with a stout lady who had a front room aching to be slept in. On the bed was a feather tick that she had brought from Russia, and when the Wolf curled up in it he sailed away and knew just how Hop-

head Hank must have felt when he saw fields of poppies and tin cans full of gold and all the policemen on traffic duty.

Charlie dreamed on, when suddenly beneath him there ripped out a clatter of an iron knocker against a vibrating brass gong. He sat straight up in the yielding feather tick and rubbed his ears.

"A burglar alarm," he whispered. "Am I dreaming'?"

He was not dreaming. The bell must have clanged away for ten minutes before he heard a sleepy man thump down the stairs, blaspheming in a jargon that was strange to Charlie's ear. He heard a lock grind open and some one moving heavily below him, and the bell stopped its clatter suddenly. He heard the man come up again and slam a door and all was quiet.

The Wolf lolled back into the warm feathers, pulled the quilt up to his chin, doubled his knees luxuriously, and beat it back to that land where he had no four-time record and where he didn't have to climb porches to blunder and to plunder.

Next morning the old lady served him a breakfast such as Napoleon wrote into history in his tragic Russian memoirs, Heine immortalized in his remi-

niscences, and Gladstone longed for when he had grown too eminent to feast among his own people.

"It's nice?" she asked.

"It's a lallah," said the Wolf.

"You slept nice?"

"Like a da—like a doggone baby."

"You hear it rings sometimes a bell?"

"Yeh—I made it. Sounded like a touchoff."

"No," said the old lady. "Tochow, he's next block. It was by Lefkowitz, downstairs, in his pine shop."

Before the breakfast was over the Wolf had been apprised of a strange state of affairs.

Lefkowitz, the rich Ghetto pawnbroker, was the man who had arisen in midnight to shut off the burglar bell. Lefkowitz was deadly afraid of thieves. Most of his business was done after six in the evening, which left most of his current moneys on the premises over night. He had installed a hair-trigger burglar alarm with attachments to every door and window, so delicate that the jar of a heavy wagon passing on the cobbled street frequently upset it and started it whanging until it woke up the whole neighborhood and until Lefkowitz made his weary and profane way down two flights of stairs to shut it off.

The entire neighbourhood had become inured, accustomed and hardened to it. The police paid no further attention to it.

Two nights later the Wolf's slumbers again were torn by the ringing of the Ghetto nuisance, and again some ten minutes elapsed while old Lefkowitz awoke, got on his bathrobe or whatever he wore that would correspond, and bumped his heavy-footed way down to shut off the scandalous uproar. Three nights later the same thing happened.

Next evening, as he lay on the bed in his clothes, at the open window, the Wolf heard familiar voices below. The Chief's star thistledown "dicks" were conversing.

"This is the layout where that there queer alarm goes off every twenty minutes," said Kelly to Kiernan.

"Yeh—an' nobody pays no attention to it. Like the kid that kep' on yellin 'Wolf,'" said Kiernan to Kelly.

"Speakin' o' Wolf, what d'ye figger's happened to Charlie the Wolf? He hasn't been around the old corners for a week," said Kelly to Kiernan.

"Layin' low on some tough job, likely. He's a crook in his heart. Any time he ain't where you can

see him he's where he can see a haul," said Kiernan to Kelly.

And the chief's prima donnas went along.

"Always all wrong," mused Charlie. And he dozed off until the alarm went off beneath him with such suddenness and violence that it lifted him half a foot in the air before he remembered that it was harmless.

Next night old Lefkowitz heard his proprietary riot under way and in full cry shortly before daylight. He turned over twice, yawned, stretched, pulled his beard, and almost wished he hadn't ever installed the thing which was so ringingly efficient.

"Let it ring," he said, and prepared to put his head back on the pillow.

A neighbor's window went up.

"Hey," called the neighbor. "Hey—you—Lefkowitz! Ab you don' shut it up by your rotten hock shop this ferflugte bell I throw right away through your vindeh, a teapot."

Lefkowitz groaned, yawned, slid out of bed, and started down his nightly path to cut off and reset the switch. He unlocked the door leading to the corridor, and a draught struck him. With a cry of fear he threw up the light, took one sweeping look

through his store, and ran through the open alley door, screaming:

"P'lice—p'lice—robbers—p'lice."

The shop had been turned inside out. The old-fashioned safe had been chiselled open and \$700 worth of loot had been abstracted.

The kindly old landlady knocked six times on the front room door that morning, and, getting no answer, opened it. The Wolf was gone, hide and hair. On the dresser she saw currency. It was a \$20 bill, pinned to a note which was later read to her by a little girl next door who went to school. It was as follows:

"Here's a dubble X for you. It's all right—I got a bankroll. That bed and them brekfests was worth every jit of it. I won't be back no more. I can't stand the noise from that there bell. I come here to live quiet and pertickly to get away from pawn-shops and burglar alarms and such as that. You was great to me and I wanted to stay. But your brekfests wasn't the only thing what was handed to me here on a platter. Give my regards to his Whiskers and tell him I says go get a bulldog.

"So long respectfully your

Border."

"Saw the Wolf layin' around," said Kelly to Kieran.

"Yeh—he's got new clothes and a wad," said Kiernan to Kelly.

"Says he got \$700 from an uncle," said Kelly to Kiernan.

IV

CHARLIE THE WOLF GETS BY WITH IT

Kelly and Kiernan were telling how sweet it was in the old days and how lean the years had grown.

"It seems the grifters was more entertaining in the old days—or was it because we was younger and had more heart in our work?" said Kelly to Kiernan.

"Them was woolly, bully days when they was honor among thieves, but now most of the jobs is done by rummies without no records or nothin', and the best way to look for a crook is in the city directory," said Kiernan to Kelly.

And they both sat silent for a while and smoked and thought.

"Have you been over to the grave lately?" asked Kelly of Kiernan.

"Sunday," said Kiernan to Kelly.

And here is the story.

Seven years ago Kelly and Kiernan rounded up a

gang of seven burglars. They had done 120 "jobs" in two years. Six of the prisoners were bearded and hardened thieves. One was a boy of seventeen—Johnny Symanski.

Johnny had been raised in the streets and fed in the alleys. He was one of twelve children. His father earned \$1.60 a day in the lumber yards, near which they lived in a basement. Johnny wasn't strong. Some boys thrive on bits of bread, swigs of flat beer, and cigarettes. Johnny somehow didn't. He was a pale weakling who always looked like a chased cur. But they said he could shinny up a porch post to jimmy a door for a second-story "job" better than Oliver Twist and twice as willingly.

The gang was arrested in the usual way. A "stool pigeon" turned them up to Kiernan for 50 cents. Some of the plunder was found around them. They admitted more than one hundred crimes.

When the trial came up all were represented by counsel—and good counsel it was. That is, all except Johnny. His folks had been notified, but they either didn't care or couldn't. Anyway, nobody came to see him in jail and nobody appeared for him at the trial. The other six deserted him cold. Johnny never uttered a whimper. He was called

as a witness against them, but was deaf and dumb. The six got indefinite terms.

Johnny got a separate trial because of his youth. Having not yet reached the penitentiary age, he required special treatment. All alone, shrinking, shivering, pale and thin, he nodded his head to the judge in a plea of guilty and looked up with his faded eyes for the inevitable answer.

The judge didn't have much taste for his job. Kelly saw that and stepped up.

"Judge," he said, "here's a lad what never had no chance. Parole him to me. I'll steer him straight."

The judge seemed relieved and did it gladly.

Johnny was to report weekly to Kelly. For a while he did. Then he disappeared. For five years nothing was heard from him.

One night, after midnight, Kelly and Kiernan were kicking their heels in the captain's office when the burglar-buzzer went off. It pointed to a minor bank on a lonely corner. The detectives ran over. Kelly took the back and Kiernan ran around to the front. The rear door was open. The iron bars had been bent and the iron door within forced—how, no one ever knew.

In the dim light of the office Kelly saw a shadow

move. He turned toward it and pointed his revolver. Just then he felt the steel of a gun barrel against his ribs.

"Drop that gat," whispered a thin voice in his ear. And Kelly did it.

The burglar threw up the lights and Kelly saw himself standing beside a masked man. The little eyes through the slits turned toward him. Then the gun slid down at the end of a limp arm.

"It's kill you or a long stretch for me, Mr. Kelly," said the burglar. "I'll take the stripes."

And he pulled off the mask,

He was Johnny Symanski.

Kelly was too puzzled and surprised to answer.

After a moment he stuck out his right hand and up came Johnny's, unconscious of the fact that it held a shining revolver. They were just about to shake hands when Kiernan, who had entered from the front, seeing his partner facing a man who was raising a revolver, fired over Kelly's shoulder. Johnny threw both arms up wildly and pitched over.

They folded his arms across his narrow chest and knelt beside the dead burglar and prayed for forgiveness—for him and for themselves.

Then they called an ambulance and carried out the

burden, which was light for their arms but heavy for their hearts.

Nobody ever knew who had been killed. He was buried as "Unidentified Man," and Kelly and Kiernan were the only mourners.

They bought him a grave where they knew he would have wished to be buried.

That was two years ago.

"Have you seen Charlie the Wolf since he picked up that bank roll?" said Kelly to Kiernan.

"I seen him yesterday," said Kiernan to Kelly.

"You know that story he told us about getting \$700 from his uncle—well, you can take that with a ton of salt," said Kelly to Kiernan.

"He copped it from Lefkowitz's pawnshop. He was living in the same house," said Kiernan to Kelly.

"Who tipped you?" asked Kelly of Kiernan.

"Oh, an old 'stool' of mine," said Kiernan to Kelly.

"Think we oughtta go and pick him up?" said Kelly to Kiernan.

"Let him get away with it," said Kiernan to Kelly. "The 'stool' is the same one what tipped off a big gang to me years ago. He's a no-good rat and he'd double-cross his dyin' mother for the price of a scuttle o' beer."

"What big gang did he ever tip off to you?" said Kelly to Kiernan.

"The Bill Branigan gang—the one Johnny was with," said Kiernan to Kelly.

V

KELLY AND KIERNAN GO TOY SLUMMING

"This crime wave has to stop," said the Chief to Kelly and Kiernan.

"You have my symp'ty," said Kelly to the Chief.

"The guns is mighty hungry an' roughhouse this year," said Kiernan to the Chief.

"Go on out and collar a few crooks," said the Chief to both of them.

So they went forth to buy a few things for the Christmas tree and nice, warm mittens for Kelly's children, and a sweater jacket for Mrs. Kelly, née Kiernan, sister of the twin-star detective.

They wedged and eddied through, and with the throngs along the main stem made their way to the toy department first. They were examining red sleds with the suspicious eyes of expert detectors when they saw, across the aisle, fumbling over some woolly bears, no one except Charlie the Wolf, their

friend and entertainer, the four-time long-term porch climber of golden memories.

"Hello, Wolf," called Kelly to Charlie.

"Out blowing sucker dough?" rejoined Charlie to Kelly and Kiernan.

"Just a few little knickknacks for the women an' the toddlers," said Kiernan to Charlie. "What's your lay?"

"Takin' on a bundle o' fuzzy lambs an' audimadic alligators," said the Wolf. "Listen to this here teddy bear. See? When you pinches his stomach he growls. It ain't a reg'ler growl, but kids don' know much, an' it'll do. I'm takin' three o' them bears."

"I'm kinda strong on sleds," said Kelly. "Them toy animals don' go far wit' healt'y boys. They wanna slide down hills an' play horse-stuck-in-de-snow an' all that there kinda rough an' tumble."

"A boy what's big enough to coast on a sled is big enough to steal his toys," said Charlie the Wolf. "I'm buyin' for little ones what ain't got no way to get nuthin' excep' somebody slips 'em."

"Do you like them high sleds?" said Kiernan to the Wolf. "Or is them ones what's close to the ground better for a little Turk about this high, huh?"

"I useta always crave them gunboat ones wit' slipp'ry runners what you fall on an' sail down a hill," said the Wolf. "Say—when I was a little goat when I useta live out back o' the Yards an' the winters was good an' cold them days, say, I useta climb up Hogan's hill f'm behind, hold up one o' them there little Fords on skates, flop on it an' away I'd go—'way down till I lit in a bank o' soft snow acrost the froze road. Sure—them low boys is the goods."

"I was thinkin'," said Kelly to Kiernan, "that one wit' the horse painted on don' look as strong as this here one wit' 'Snowbird' stencilled on top, huh? Think Roger'd like that there one better, or would he?"

"You're all wrong," said Kiernan to Kelly. "Go 40 cents deeper an' send out that light green one wit' the steerin' bar in the front. Steerin' bars is the greates' thing you can put on a coastin' sled. Don' I see them little rowdies aroun' out where we live beltin' down in the middle o' the street an' sailin' aroun' wagons an' trucks an' walkin' people like they wasn't there? All on account o' them steerin' bars. Them is the latest, an' they only hurts you 40 cents more. Be a sport, Kell, Christmas don' come only oncet a year—go the limit."

"These here shaggy pussy-cats, they ain' bad for a quarter," sang out the Wolf. "Pipe the ribbons on their neck, wit' a little bell on the end. Them is for girls, them is."

"I guess I'll take one wit' steerin' bars. You're right, Kiernan," said Kelly. "Let the kid get away wit' the best. So I guess that there on, huh?"

"The one underneat' it," said Kiernan. "The color's puttier. You know how kids is. They sets a lot o' store by colors. I can remember just like it was last week, or last mont', how I useta t'row rocks at a sissy kid what lived in the nex' block f'm me becus he had a green sled an' the paint was all rubbed offen mine. I done that for days. Then one day he leaves his green sled out on his lawn while he runs in to get a cup o' hot tea or somethin' an' I comes by an' after that I had a green sled an' he didn't have none at all. The green one is the toppiest, Kell. Roger'll like the green one, take it f'm me."

"Do you s'pose," called the Wolf, "that these here lambs'd get dirty awful quick? They're mighty nice, but they're so damn white, kinda. I wonder if they got any black sheeps or blue ones or somethin'. These here white ones won' never do. Y' know

babies starts in to eat 'em, an' when they gets dirty they're t'rough."

"Well," said Kelly, "black ones gets as dirty just as quick as white ones, don't they?"

"Maybe," said the Wolf. "But it don' show, an' what their mother don' know won't hurt 'em. Dirt don' hurt kids. If it did we'd all of us be dead. But them white ones looks so soiled after a baby gives 'em a game on the floor a while."

"Them eyes," said Kelly. "They looks like they won't live long, an' a baby'll swallow 'em if babies is anything like they useta be."

"You're right," said the Wolf. "That scratches them white lambs. I wonder how the lions is. But lions is for boys only. Girls don' take no intrust in lions. They wan's cats an' poodles an' lambs. An' I got bears for boys now. Them pussy-cats wit' bells is all right for girls, but I got t'ree o' them now. Guess I'll give them squirrels the up an' over."

Their arms were full of bundles when they got to the bottom of the elevator shaft.

"Maybe Roger won't eat up that green sled wit' the steerin' bars, huh?" said Kelly to Kiernan.

"I dunno about them squirrels," said the Wolf. "I dunno. They looks putty delicitt. But I guess

they can still be played wit' after the tails is off, huh?"

"Say!" said Kiernan to the Wolf. "Who are you buyin' all that junk for? You ain't got no kids."

"I guess a guy what's lived the life I have, what's chivvied a livin' off o' secon' stories for thirty years barrin' when I was in stir—I guess a guy what's done that there can find a few kids to give toys to," said the Wolf, and he walked the other way, showing that he felt affronted.

VI

BOY HAS TO BREAK THE LAW

Kelly and Kiernan turned from the bench in the Boys' Court. Their case had just been put over by the judge, who wanted time to investigate further.

"Aw, what's there to investigate?" said Kelly to Kiernan.

"If they sent a few more o' these here young bums to the school an' done less investigatin' there'd be less work for us an' more action on the books," said Kiernan to Kelly.

"Just a minute," said Charlie the Wolf, and they turned to see their old friend, drink-buyer and mono-

logist, the four-term second-story wonder with a heart.

Charlie led them to Jake's Place, lined them against the mahogany, and spake.

"That there boy," said the Wolf, "I know him. An' I know his old man. The kid is learnin' to be a barber an' he works at it days. The old man is a cobbler an' he works at it days an' nights. There's four in the family—the old folks, the kid, an' a younger brother. They all lives on State Street in part of a room curtained off o' the cobbler shop with a tarpaulin.

"This here boy was pinched for hangin' around a poolroom. The law says a boy is gotta be eighteen before he does that. After he's eighteen it's all right. Well, he's only seventeen an' a half, so it's all wrong. An' for that you wanna send him down to the school an' make a crook outta him."

"A reform school is to make men outta that kind o' tough kids," said Kelly.

"A little stretch behind the window wouldn't do that little rat no harm," said Kiernan.

"How'd you like a little of it yourself?" said Charlie to Kelly and Kiernan.

"How'd you like to see your boy down there with

the scum an' the vermin? That there boy didn't do nothin' that youse didn' do when you was his age an' I didn' do long before. Maybe that's why we're all crooked. Maybe that's what started us. But I done mine in the school, an' in the reformatory twicet, an' in the big house four times. Did it make a man outta me? I ain' no man. I'm a wreck. You wouldn' lemme talk to your wife or shake hands wit' your kids. An' I went t'rough the cleansing fire of all them public finishin' academies."

"Well? Whadde you want us to do? Pat him on the back an' thank him for violatin' the poolroom ordinance?" said Kelly.

"We don' make no laws—we only see to it that them laws what are made is kep'," said Kieran.

"Wit' a billy an' a gun an' a pair o' bracelets youse see to it that shoe clerks don' spit on the sidewalks an' boys what ain't got no other place don' go to the only place they got to go," said the Wolf, with a touch of bitterness.

"The night this here kid was nailed it was 10 below zero. His old man was coughin' an' smokin' a pipe. The old lady was asleep. The littler kid was shootin' a marble again' the stove. It wasn' no ideal home

atmosphere for a growin' lad who wanted a little fun. He took his hat an' he went out.

"Where could he go? He didn' have a jit. He couldn' go to no theayter, that costs dough. He couldn' go to no Y. M. C. A., that costs dough. He wouldn' go to no mission. How many kids would? Would you? Would your kids? No—there was that wop poolroom, with a lotta guys knockin' balls around. The kid floats in there. He sits in a chair. He ain' doin' nothin'. Youse come in; he goes out."

"It's a violation," said Kelly.

"If we didn' take him we'd go up before the trial board," said Kiernan.

"I ain't blamin' youse," said the Wolf. "Only it hurts me, that's all.

"Until the night you took that lad in his record was clean an' he had no more to do wit' coppers than I got to do wit' preachers. Now he's been in for two nights an' he'll be in eight nights more till you report to the court what I'm tellin' you now. An' I know you will. You ain't gonna slough that lad. You ain't got no reason to. You'll tell the court an' he'll let him go with a warnin'. But in the meantime? What's he doin' now? Huh?

"He's herded in wit' a lotta young dips an' porch-

climbers, listenin' to the weird, gaudy tales o' their rotten young lives. He won't forget them. He'll come out sore. Even if he's paroled he'll be sore. Everybody'll know he's been pinched an' tried. Maybe the best he'll get'll be paroled. That'll hang over him. He'll prob'ly get the gate in that there barber school. Then where'll he go? Down a alley wit' a foot o' gaspipe till he gets enough to buy a gat an' take a chance on the street. An' you know what his finish'll be? He'll kill a copper. They all does, them kind o' boys what's made sore by what they thinks is a bum deal, whether it is or not."

"I'll tell you," said Charlie the Wolf. "This here haulin' first offenders t'rough the works is what makes a lotta boys second offenders. They're showed up in the detective bureau to the dicks. 'This here is a dangerous young can'idate for the pen,' says the sergeant, pointing at a mush-faced youngster charged wit' swipin' a ham or sayin' 'Oh, you kid' to a blonde. He didn't know that before. He swells up his underfed chest an' a new light comes in his eyes. The sergeant is right—he is a dangerous kid—from that there moment on.

"Then comes the reporters an' they calls him fancy

monickers an' when he gets back home the other kids points at him an' talks in whispers an' he swaggers past 'em thinkin'—'Dangerous kid,' he's thinkin'. An' then he has to live up to his reputation or be a heel, an' a kid would rather do life than weaken after he's notorious. He tells a couple o' servant girls what a terror he is, an' after that it's all off. I know. Wasn't I one of 'em?

"You don' never see no roll call in Central when the sergeant puts a kid wit' his hair combed an' a clean collar on, an' points to him an' says: 'This here is a fine lad. I found him in a factory, workin' overtime. Keep yer eye on him. He's gonna be a millionaire some day.' Say—if you ever saw that you'd see a kid what would amount to somethin', because if they's anything what makes a kid pay attention it's brass buttons an' tin badges.

"No—you never see nothin' like that. No more do you see anybody sayin' what a great copper a great copper is—only what a great copper he was. After a yegg puts a tunnel t'rough a harness bull the Chief gives out a statement sayin' he feels the loss keenly an' of all the force there wasn't another uniformed man wit' the rank o' patrolman what was as faithful as this here one what was plugged. Why not

say a few things about one of 'em while he's alive? An' why not say somethin' good about a kid what lives in tenements an' slime an' behaves himself before he gets caught on a freezin' night in a warm poolroom?

"Did you ever notice how many people come to testify to a guy's good character after he's indicted? There ain' no place to go and nobody wan's to go no place to say a guy had a great rep for truth an' veracity in the community where he resides, or his record is good for peace an' quiet until he's lookin' Joliet in the eye. An' then it's too late.

"T'row in that other drink. I'm goin'. Whenever I get to talkin' about them things like that I wanna be by myself somewhere where I can think an' kick a chair."

VII

ON PREPAREDNESS

"Step down to the depot," said the Chief to Kelly and Kiernan. "The sheriff is taking a bunch of crooks to Joliet this morning, and there'll probably be a few dips and grifters around to see them off. Maybe you can pick up somebody that we need."

"The thieves is pretty busy nowadays—I don't

hardly think they'll be loafin' around the depots," said Kelly.

"The good ones don't get up till noon," said Kiernan.

"To the depot—and beat it," said the Chief to Kelly and Kiernan, and the pet front-office "dicks" started.

Kelly and Kiernan bowed genially to the deputy who had the squad of six in tow—a burglar, a confidence man, and four bank robbers. The half dozen were chained together at the wrists and looked meek enough. The train pulled out and Kelly and Kiernan pulled away.

"Not a live one did I see," said Kelly to Kiernan.

"The Chief had a bum whisper," said Kiernan to Kelly.

"Come down to see the trains come in?" said Charlie the Wolf, who had stepped noiselessly between them from behind, startling the detectives mightily. When they saw it was only their old crony, the four-time penitentiary graduate, porch-climber, raconteur, and drink-buyer, they sighed in relief and mechanically tracked it for Jake's, across the street.

"What'll you have?" asked the Wolf, digging into his pocket.

"The bottle," said Kelly and Kiernan, pointing at once.

It was so ordered.

"What brings you around a depot?" asked Kelly of the Wolf. "That ain't your game."

"Just come in? Where was you? Or are you goin' somewheres?" said Kiernan to the Wolf.

"Just blew down to see the boys off," said Charlie. "Nick Marzen, that big guy with the low head, what was in that picnic, is a old cellmate o' mine from the big house. I done two diff'rent stretches with him. He ain't a bad guy, Nick. But he's all wrong. He'll never get nowheres, and he's a failure."

Kelly and Kiernan poured. Charlie paid.

"Marzen," said the Wolf, "went down to the stir about twenty years ago for murder. He was a butcher. And he killed a guy with a cleaver, a messy job. He was in jail about two years while the lawyers was fightin' for the little wad his folks had, and with their combined efforts he was sentenced to be hung. Then a governor commutes him and he gets a life stretch and down he starts, when they commutes him again and he gets thirty-five years. Well, he does about seventeen years and he gets out."

"He went down for burglarly," said Kelly to the Wolf.

"And a bungle trick it was, too," said Kiernan to the Wolf.

"Sure," said Charlie to Kelly and Kiernan. "What does a butcher know about second-story work? This guy never got no trainin'. He was a roughneck from his heels up, and that there murder was some kind of a grudge mix-up. But when he comes out his folks don't want him—nobody wants him. So he looks around for a way to live. Well, he starts to be a thief.

"Here's somethin' about that that maybe youse never thought of. You know, guys goes into the profession o' stealin', which is one o' the hardest an' most cultivated businesses known to man, without no preparation, without no schoolin', without no special talent, an', sometimes, without no serious reflection at all.

"A guy what wants to be a plumber, he learns first how to handle a monkey-wrench an' a fountain pen; a lad what's ambitious to drive a truck, he learns which way to pull a rein an' how to tie up traffic on a crossin'; a gink what is desirous of growin' into a barber learns how to strop a razor till it nearly cuts

an' how to get a shavin' brush in your ear. But here goes a nut like Marzen, with hands as big as flour bags, the light tread of a coal wagon, an' the agility of a derrick, an' he busts into a flat, wakes up the police a mile away, sends in a riot call with every footstep, an' comes down the porch pillar into the arms of squads of police gathered from six stations an' numb with waitin' in the cold."

"He's right," said Kelly, setting down his glass. "The boy talks sense."

"A little more from the bottle, Jake," said Kiernan.

"And what's the answer?" said the Wolf. "You just saw part of it. Back goes the big lummoX to get a new number.

"When he first comes down there he's got a little class. Murder ain't nothin' to play with. An' everybody points him out an' says here's a husky what chopped up a guy with a meat axe, which got him some small privileges an' distinctions. But now? A very bum burglary what he done with a axe, too. He'll get no rec'nition in the pen this trip. He's very low now, very low.

"An' it serves him dead right. He starts at the top o' the profession t'rough a accidental piece o' work that didn't have no much purpose in it, but

establishes him as a dangerous man. That ain't the way to begin. It was a shine an' a flash in the pan. His career wasn' founded on substantial progress from the ground up. An' now the results is comin' out an' you sees he ain't properly prepared."

"I see just what you mean," said Kiernan.

"No—just plain water on the side," said Kelly.

"The usual way," said the Wolf, "the right way, is to begin as a lad, stealin' mild at first—maybe a few bananas or some brass out of a basement. Then he gets nailed an' he goes to the juv'nile home. Then he comes out an' goes at it with a little new courage an' he lands in the reform college. When he comes out he's beginnin' to know somethin' an' he starts good, which gets him in jail or the bridewell, or both. A few bits in them is solid foundation for a future.

"Then, when he's got a little age an' wisdom an' nerve he turns his first neat one. Maybe he gets away. Maybe he gets away with a few. Then he's nailed an' he goes down to the stir, developed an' ready to learn from the older an' smarter guys there.

"Then he comes out an' he's seasoned. He tries soft ones, maybe, for a while, so he'll stay out a few months. Then he gets his bravery back an' pretty

soon they cops him in a fly job, done good but gone bad. He goes back. He gets out again. This time they ain't gonna take him so easy. He's gettin' a little sour on the bars. So the next time they corners him he yanks a gat an' he kills a bull, an' in the due an' decent course o' time an' reg'lar process o' law they jerks him on the end of a rope an' he goes wherever he's goin' an' everybody says there was a well-regulated, orderly life—he begun at the beginnin' an' he worked his way up an' he stayed up till they drops him t'rough.

"But this big, fat, clumsy Marzen, he begins with a murder and is sentenced to be hung; then he gets life; then thirty-five years; he's out in seventeen; now he goes down for a indeterm'nate from one to five years; when he gets out he'll be timid an' he'll do a petty sneak turn an' he'll get a year in the band-house; that'll make him a bum an' he'll get vagged an' go back for six months. You know what his finish'll be? Five an' costs for sleepin' in a hallway."

VIII

AT THE BALL PARK

"This here is tough," said Kelly to Kiernan.
"What's shot now?" said Kiernan to Kelly.

"The Chief wants us to go down to the ball park an' see if we can pick up any stray dips," said Kelly to Kiernan.

"You bet it's tough," said Kiernan to Kelly. "Bein' sentenced to watch a ball game on a nice, warm, lazy afternoon, when the rest o' the dicks is sweatin' in Central or hoofin' around on cement pavements, is pretty hard to take."

So the Chief's pet front-office sleuths slipped over to Jake's and took on ballast and then proceeded to the stadium where the mourning thousands had assembled to deplore the passing of their grandmothers.

Kelly and Kiernan enjoyed the game in that listless, blasé way that seasoned detectives lend to their amusements. If there had been any pickpockets present they were innocent of any knowledge in the matter. None had come up to make themselves known, anyway.

But Kelly and Kiernan, through habit rather than sense of duty, slipped out before the last visiting batter struck out and took their stations at each side of the main exit gate to sort of give the passing throng the see-saw.

Thus engaged, both their hearts beat faster as they simultaneously spied Charlie the Wolf, the genial

four-time ex-convict, second-story man, reminiscent drink-buyer and sawdust-floor philosopher.

The chase for malefactors ended right there. The agents of law and order closed in on the Wolf, linked arms with him, and arrested him—that is, took him into custody as far as the nearest saloon, where Charlie, as a form and rite, asked them what they'd have, and they in similar observance pointed at the dark-brown bottle.

When Charlie's \$2 bill lay upon the moist mahogany, not to be heard from until it had been pickled in alcohol and preserved in the cash register, he assumed his prerogative and started.

"That there," said Charlie the Wolf, "is the first ball game what I see in years in a reg'lar park. I ain't been loose now for a lot o' springs. So I thought I'd drill out this afternoon and see if these here p'fesh'nals is worth all the space what them sportin' writers gives 'em.

"Them ain't no slouch tossers, them ain't. But down in the pen we had a few what wasn't cripples, neither. I seen many a game down there, and for a while I plays on one o' the teams myself.

"Us cons what worked in the broom-fact'ry, we had a team. An' the chair-shop had one, an' the

rockpile gang was the champeens, bein' in better condition alwus t'rough takin' more exercise.

"Well, we're playin' one Saturday afternoon in the prison yard, us broom-workers again the rock-smashers. It was the decidin' game and we'd been trainin' and talkin' and framin' for weeks.

"It turns out to be a fine day. The sun was shinin' and the air was warm and there wasn' no strong wind. We trots out on the field and everybody was all keyed up. They was many a bet down that day and some o' the poor scrubs stood to lose everything excep' their numbers if they guesses wrong.

"The warden and his fam'ly is sittin' over on a bench and they gives each team the high-sign o' success and good wishes as each side takes its practic'n' in turn.

"Then comes the call o' 'Play ball!'

"The umpire is a little forger f'm down state, who busted a young bank and went South with a Sunday-school treasury. He had mutton-chop whiskers when he was brought in. But now, of course, he was shaved smooth.

"He gets behind the plate and the game starts. Our pitcher is our star hope. He would o' sure landed in some big league if it hadn't o' been that

he was caught comin' out o' the wrong flat with a lot o' junk. We're dependin' on him to hold down them sluggers from the quarry.

"And he does. Innin' after innin' goes by. The score is 3 and 2 in our favor in the ninth. They ain't been a run in four innin's.

"The stone-crackers is got last bat. They's two out and one husky jailbird on third. He was a great batter, but he couldn't run very fast. I guess that's why he was doin' time. Anyway, a hit would bring him in and the game'd be tied up. Two runs and all'd be over and we'd be on the bum.

"Our pitcher winds up and he slams one in. The guy at bat is a immense brute what killed two teamsters with his fists and is doin' life. His name is Gibbs and we all calls him Gibbs the Giant.

"Well, the firs' ball comes hummin' in. Gibbs makes a swing like a pay-as-you-enter car goin' aroun' a curve. He misses the ball a yard. One strike. The nex' ball he foul-tips. Two strikes. He spits on his hands, taps his heel with his wagon-tongue, and steps up again. Our little porch-climber slips him a slow one what sort o' sails, hesitates, wobbles, and floats right square over the centre o' the plate.

"I t'rows my mitt in the air and starts in. If ever they was a strike that there slow boy was Mr. Strike hisself.

"Quick as the ball slaps in the catcher's glove, Giant Gibbs spins aroun' and he looks that there little banker umpire in the eye. The umpire is got his face all set to call a decision.

"Gibbs steps a foot near him and he slants out that tough jaw o' his'n, and he puts it about a inch from where the little banker's mutton chops was in his days o' glory.

"The umpire gulps and coughs and stands froze.

" 'Well,' says Gibbs. 'Call it—call it. Say some-thin'. What was that?'"

"The umpire looks up at Gibbs, towerin' over him, with the bat raised in both of his hands.

" 'Why,' says the umpire. 'Why—one ball!'"

"Say—you should o' heard the holler what went up f'm that broom-corn-cuttin' bunch o' soreheads. Our captain comes runnin' in. Gibbs stands there with his bat and he waves him back. And back he goes, bein' only a con-man what couldn't lick nobody excep' maybe some woman.

"They wasn't nothin' to it. Our pitcher lets fly a fast one. But his nerve is gone. Gibbs lights

on it and he knocks it out where many a convict what watched it would o' liked to be—way outside the walls, way out into freedom and vict'ry. The lumber-jack on third comes waddlin' home and Gibbs tears gallopin' in behind him. And the broom-makers is paupers for a month. There wasn' a chew o' t'bac-co left in the shop."

"It's all diff'rent now, though," said Kelly to the Wolf. "Now you're ridin' easy and they ain' no empire takin' you."

"He's right," said Kiernan to the Wolf. "Right he is. Now you got a little dough for yourself and even a few jits to spare to treat a friend now an' again."

"Oh," said Charlie the Wolf. "If that's what you mean—have another drink. Sure."



III

FELICE O' THE FOLLIES



III

FELICE O' THE FOLLIES

THEY tell the story of a king who, when told that the poor had no bread to eat, answered naively: "Why don't they eat cake?"

It isn't as absurd as it may appear. Cake is sometimes available where bread is impossible.

I have known men to drive about in their costly autos because they didn't have car fare; I have seen men guzzle wine because it was free when they couldn't raise ham and eggs; many a girl has been presented with silk stockings when what she needed was flannel underwear.

So was it with Felice—chorus girl.

Felice was in "The Follies." To be there meant to be a chorus aristocrat, the last word in the arrival of the fittest. It meant that if she eloped her picture would go on Page 1 instead of being buried next to classified ads. It meant that milliners and gowners would freely credit her. It meant that all the other

girls in all the other choruses would envy her and talk about her.

But it did not mean that she did not have an old mother who stayed behind in New York when "The Follies" went a-touring. It did not mean that the \$30 a week wasn't spent before it came in to support the old mother, send a younger sister to school, and pay fines and costs for her brother, a young scapegrace who kept getting into every manner of cheap and disreputable trouble all the time.

Felice had no burning desire for millinery, gowns, diamonds, automobiles, or furs. What she wanted was to see her mother's rent paid, her sister's tuition and bare expenses provided, and her brother out of jail. Little enough for a chorus beauty, nineteen years old, with a tousled head of yellow hair that sparkled back the footlights, flash for flash, and a pair of limbs that made many a wife in the audience nervous.

Felice made her own hats, and they cost an average of \$1.67 and they looked like \$90. She affected girlishness, because the wardrobe of an ingénue is cheaper than that of a leading woman. She made her own breakfasts and ate her dinners far from the gilded places where waiters' tips determine one's social standing.

Felice was no prude or wall-flower. She met men—the kind most chorus girls mostly meet, mostly—and now and then she accepted after-theatre invitations, and was pressed to have some more guinea hen and drink another glass of Burgundy. The men always offered taxi rides to and from, never were derelict in ordering and suggesting the best on the bill of fare, and always tipped handsomely—the waiters.

What they spent on Felice any evening would have made her happy for a week if she had it. Mother kept writing for more money and sister never had enough, and brother—the more he got the more fly paper he got into, and the less he had the more wrong ways he found to go after it and get himself into other sorts of messy mischief.

So Felice scrimped and cut expenses all she could and kept drawn ahead, and even now and then had to borrow from Psyche, her friend in the front row. Psyche always had money. She spent more a week than she earned a month, but she always had money. Some one kept sending it to her—in checks. Felice never inquired into it. For one thing, Felice was not curiously disposed. For another, Felice and everybody else in “show business” knew who it was that

sent it and how much and why—so Felice never felt tempted to inquire.

Felice could have had checks, too, maybe. Nobody had ever offered to send her any. The financial overtures toward girls of the chorus are really largely overestimated. But Felice was neither a child nor a fool. And the fact that no one wants to give one something doesn't preclude the possibility of getting something if one asks for or goes after it. But Felice didn't want it that way.

Felice was glad when the troupe got to Chicago. Chicago meant at least twelve weeks, and that meant boarding-house rates. On week stands it is hard to get settled, and it is so easy to fall into a hotel near the theatre.

But in Chicago there was a boarding-house, where she had lived the season before, and she had written ahead, and it was all right—there would be room at the table and a room the size of a table and the whole works would cost \$6 a week. Adding 60 cents a week for car fares and about a dollar for the two dinners downtown on matinee days and enough for tooth-powder, newspapers, and the postage stamps to send money home with, she should be able to mail out about \$21 each week. That wasn't bad.

Psyche went to a big hotel downtown with four trunks. Felice went out to the boarding-house with a little steamer half stuffed with paper to keep the things from rattling.

Now, if this were a popular story a terrible accident should happen to Psyche and Felice should live happy in the realization that she was a good girl and was kind to her relations. But this will not be a popular story. Nothing out of the way happened to Psyche. Her check was a day late, but that wasn't serious. And Felice lived only as happily as one may at \$6 a week.

Even that happiness lasted only till she received a night letter (collect) from her brother, as follows:

"Richmond, Va.—Police framed on me here, waited till they got me standing in front of gambling-house and threw me in and I'm fined ten and costs, making sixteen in all, and unless you wire me twenty here, care city jail, will have to do ten days. Don't throw me down this time. It will be the last. Affectionately, your loving brother, HAL."

Felice had just sent \$14 to her sister and \$8.50 to her mother, and she didn't have \$3 in the world. She hadn't paid up her overdrafts on the manager and he had said that would be about all. So she

went to Psyche and said excitedly that she must have \$20. "Sure," said Psyche. "Fifty if you need it." Felice said twenty would do and she took it.

Psyche's money felt heavy, though it looked just like any other money. If it was tainted, the taint didn't show on the face of the bill, which was yellow in back and green in front and had pictures on it and the figure "20" in 987 places. Felice looked it over and over before she gave it to the telegraph clerk together with the necessary change for transporting it.

The clerk, a girl, looked up when she read the address on the wire and grinned.

"You chorus girls has queer sweethearts in queer places," said the clerk.

Felice let it go at that. It was better than the truth.

Next day she got word that her mother had fallen on a soapy floor and broken her wrist, and that required a doctor and no end of expense—\$15 or \$18 anyway. Felice scratched her yellow head. Just then a special delivery arrived from her sister saying that the girls were all getting class pins and they cost \$4.50 apiece, and while, of course, sis didn't want to be too hard on Felice if money was getting tight, still

she would feel just a little cheap and different if she couldn't have it, because all the other girls were going to have class pins.

Felice made one more trip to the kindly manager. He shook his head and said he absolutely could not advance another cent—it was against the rules to let any girl get in any further than Felice was now hypothecated. He lent her \$10 from his own pocket, which she took with a blush and of which she sent \$5 to her sister in the next mail. That left her not enough to take care of the mother's extra doctor bill, so she waited till salary day and gave the boarding-house landlady a heart-interest story (fictitious) and sent all her wages home, which was enough to pay the current expense and mend the wrist besides.

That night a youth with a tall collar was introduced to Felice and he invited her to dinner. She accepted and he met her at the theatre after she had gone "home" to change to her other things.

The youth bought flowers, engaged a taxi, and led her into the basement refectory, not noticing that two gray-haired waiters and two fat travelling men laughed. He pressed cocktails, oysters, soup, crab-flakes, squab, ice, corrugated ice cream, and a toy demitasse on her, paid the bill with a flourish, tossed

the waiter \$2, and took her to the theatre in a taxicab. On the way back to the theatre he told Felice that he loved her—and he kissed her.

"Can I meet you after the show?" he asked at the stage door.

"Sure," said Felice. And he did.

They walked out of the alley together and the youth raised his hand to the waiting line of taxis and two of them started for the spot. Felice took him by the arm and led him onto the sidewalk.

"Let's not drive," she said.

The young man cocked his eyebrows.

"Prefer to walk?" he asked.

"I love fresh air," said Felice.

So they walked and talked. And he told her again that he loved her.

To the door of the subterranean café they came and he started to lead down the steps.

"Let's go somewhere else—some quiet little place," said Felice.

"Don't you like the stylish ones with cabarets and dancers and colored bands?"

"Hard on my nerves," said Felice. And she led him to a little restaurant where they didn't have to eat off the arm of a chair, but where men take their

own wives and where finger-bowls are not featured.

"Do you like the food here?" asked the cub.

"Sure—and it's kind of Bohemian," said Felice, with which he agreed as he told her that he loved her.

She walked him to a street car. He asked her whether she really preferred to ride that way. She said it was so much nicer. The youth agreed with her except—except—that is—well, one couldn't kiss a pretty girl in a street car, could one? No, one could not. But Felice said she would give him a kiss in the hallway at the boarding-house. He said he certainly would take it because he loved her.

When they arrived at the boarding-house he started for his kiss but she held him off.

"Just a minute," said Felice. "Now you've told me thirty-two times since the matinee that you love me."

"I've loved you more times than that since the night show," said he.

"Fine," said Felice. "Now listen. If you love me you want to be with me a whole lot, don't you?"

"Every minute," said the youth.

"Hardly as good as that," said Felice. "But I'll

make a little deal with you. I'll meet you every night after the show, and on Wednesdays and Saturdays after the matinee and the night show. And you can take me to supper and to dinner and home after the show. And you'll always get a kiss in the hallway."

"Wonderful," said the youth.

"Now," said Felice, "if I let you you would taxi me till I'd hear the gear-shifts grinding in my sleep and you'd buy a waiter a flat building and send that restaurant keeper to Hot Springs for a vacation and spend half a dollar a day redeeming your hat, wouldn't you?"

"When a man is in love——" he began to answer.

"Sure," said Felice. "Now, at the least, that would cost you \$10 a day, wouldn't it?"

"That's nothing," said the youth. "When a man loves a girl——"

"Yes—I know," said Felice. "Now I'll be a whole lot happier, and if you really love me you'll be just as happy on street cars and in the lunch joint. That won't cost you over \$2 a day. That way you'll save \$8 a day, won't you?"

"Yes," said he. "If that's the way you really prefer it."

"I really do," said Felice. "Because I want you to give me \$4 a day."

"Why—I'm—that is—of course if you——"

"It's a proposition," said Felice. "Now don't get me wrong. I'm no gold digger. It's been suggested that I could maybe get away with more than that. But I don't need any more and I don't want it that way. I don't want anything I don't earn. By going around with you and saving you that much I surely earn half of it, don't I?"

"When a man's in love," said the youth, "he'll stand for most anything."

"I don't want you to stand for most anything," said Felice, "because I don't propose to, myself. I want you to make \$4 a day, and let me make \$4 a day. Is it a go?"

"If you prefer it that way," said the young man.

"Here's my hand on it—till the end of the run," said Felice. "Now understand this. I'm going to feel that I'm earning that \$4 a day and you're going to feel that way, too. I wouldn't do it, only I need the money. I have a mother to keep at home and a sister to keep away from home and a young brother to keep from going to a home. So, if it's any satisfac-

tion to you, you'll know your money—my money, if you figure my way—'ll, be well spent."

"All right," said the young man. "I'll go through. But don't you tell Psyche."

"Why?" asked Felice. "Why not tell Psyche?"

"Because," said the youth, "I'm her brother and she's got my old lady and my kid sister to keep besides me, so she mightn't like it."



IV

LARS, THE USELESS, WAS A NUISANCE



IV

LARS, THE USELESS, WAS A NUISANCE

FALL had come.

There was a zip in the air that bit through summer clothes, and straw hats sold at your own price. Likewise the tanned men-about-town were about town again, telling what a wonderful time they would have had were it not their wives were along.

The first fall zephyr brought the "rheumatiz" into the old bones of Useless Lars Gustafson, and he warped his seamy face and his jaws began to knock in tattoo against the stem of his pipe.

Useless had a job and all summer it had been a joy.

It was a responsible public office, procured by influence, and it was good for life. His daughter's husband knew a precinct captain and through him had gotten it for him. He had gotten it for him because the old man was a nuisance at home, and on his new income could go away somewhere and board.

He was a sort of Inspector of Cigarette Stubs and

Gatherer of Biscuit Boxes in a big park. He walked about with a stick, at one end of which was a shiny, round spear. With the spear he stabbed to the heart the newspapers and lunch-leavings on the walks and grass plots and put them in a bag. When the bag was filled he took it to a big basket that hung suspended around the trunk of a tree, dumped his gatherings there, and started all over again.

All summer Lars had been picking up. It was pretty monotonous, but life never had given him a broad capacity for thrills, so he shuffled along and broke the dullness of it by lighting his pipe often and reading what his lunch was wrapped in.

But one day there came into his life a big love.

Useless was dumping his papers into the big basket on the tree trunk and he spilled some on the grass. He muttered peevishly, reached out and harpooned the remains of an apple and projected it centrifugally from the end of his weapon with aim to land it into the basket. Instead it described a parabola into the lower branches of the tree, some feet above the basket. From the tree came a twittering and frightened fluttering and a robin flew out, circled excitedly about, and returned timidly to where it had come from.

Lars, the Useless, Was a Nuisance 83

Useless climbed sneakingly on a bench, which backed to the other side of the tree. Up on the back he carried his old legs, then stretched to tiptoes and looked. There was a nest and it had four eggs. The robin shrank back and looked pleadingly at him. So Lars got down as best he could.

Next day when he approached the tree he stepped lightly. He put his papers into the basket gingerly, then climbed his bench again and took another look into the nest. Hello! There were two little robins, fuzzy and absurd little balls with their eyes closed, just barely wiggling their little straw legs.

Useless was in ecstasy. He had a family.

Every day thereafter his life shaped itself with that tree as its capital and that nest as its heart.

A bereavement came to shade his happiness, for less than a week later he found one of the little robins stiff beneath the tree. He dug up some sod with his spear and buried it.

Then he looked and saw that the other was well and lusty and the mother robin was feeding its gaping bill, out of all proportion to its youth and dimensions. Useless buried his grief with the dead and smiled at the surviving baby.

My, how the little robin grew! One day it flut-

tered out of the nest. Next day Useless had to stand and wait eighteen minutes before he could dump his pickings because the little fellow was perched on the edge of the basket.

Lars' daughter, whose husband had gotten him the job, had been married many years. But there were no grandchildren for Useless. One baby had come, but she had died. They had called her Helga, after Lars' dead wife, and the name lived only long enough to go on a little, cheap stone. Helga had been pretty well forgotten by everybody except Useless.

He hadn't much to think about in the present and nothing to worry about in the future, so what went through his brain at all was of the past. And when he saw that the little bird was strong and doing well, it came to him that he was not so desolated and a soft inspiration was born. Regardless of the dubious sex of the healthy little fledgling, he called him Helga.

He kept it a secret, because he knew he was old and foolish, but it was his secret and he cherished it.

Every day he watched Helga and his mother and saw how his grandbird grew strong and fine, with feathers straightening out and breast growing brown and sleek.

Lars, the Useless, Was a Nuisance 85

At first he talked to Helga from a distance, but as the days went on the bird grew to know him. Birds love fools and old men, and he was both. Helga and the mother-bird felt they could trust Useless, although his first approach had seemed hostile.

So they let the old cove talk to them and come near and they got very chummy.

Useless told them he had named the youngest Helga, and as godfather and grandfather would leave the findings that seemed appetizing to birds at the top of the heap in the basket, where the mother and the "kid" could have easy commissary, and, by saving the time wasted in hunting food, could spend a social hour with him.

The birds agreed and liked it and they grew plump on apple cores and banana skins and gave Useless most of the time he demanded.

It grew so that, when he turned with hastening old steps toward the tree, he whistled and the birds heard him coming, and peeped out at him, and peeped back to him and expected him, and Useless had more fun and more to live for than he ever had had since little Helga died.

When it was rainy and the birds wouldn't come out, he climbed to them and made funny noises, low

and kindly, and they said they'd see him when it stopped raining.

And Useless knew they loved him, and it is wonderful to be loved.

September came, with a touch of Indian summer for a day or two, then it became just September. Useless found papers to stiletto, but his trips to the tree were just as frequent.

The calendar showed October, and the job had become a sinecure. Useless could spend more time than ever with his chirping household, and never did a man come home more eagerly or faithfully than came Useless to his tree. He sat for hours at its foot and smoked and talked to the robins as they sported on the grass, which was beginning to brown at the curling edges, and they talked back to him.

One day Useless came to his light labors from the boarding-house and started for the park stables, where he kept his weapon. That was the regular routine. But it had rained most all the day before and he had seen little of his birds, so he made a detour to say good morning before he began his work day.

He whistled as he approached—whistled again, and got no answer.

They couldn't be asleep.

Lars, the Useless, Was a Nuisance 87

The sun was up and his family kept regular hours.

He felt a sting of the "rheumatiz" in his left leg and shoulder. He hurried his steps and came to the foot of his tree trunk.

He could hardly climb the bench, it hurt him so, but he made it, up to the top of the back, with a smile, to surprise his silent family with his silent coming.

Many a man has come home like that, with a smile on his lips, to play peekaboo with his own. And many a man's smile has died to find the nest empty.

Useless took a look.

The birds were not in their retreat. The furniture of straw had not been smoothed as was the morning custom. There was an unoccupied desolation about the nest.

Useless looked again and a fear stabbed him to his heart as cruelly as he stabbed the leavings of a picnic. They were gone. His Helga was gone.

And the old man climbed down and sat at the foot of his tree and lit his pipe, and shivered with the stinging morning breeze and quivered with a new and palpitating sorrow.

They were gone and had left no word behind, nor had they said good-bye.

They had gone like his first and his second Helga had gone, in silence, and when he loved them most, and in the winter of his years.

Fall had come.



V

IF A PARTY MEET A PARTY



V

IF A PARTY MEET A PARTY

IT SEEMS to be written in the book that when a man does an act of gallantry toward a female in distress he must and shall fall in love with her. Any man brave enough to be brave deserves to fare well with the fair, and it is up to him to wrap his strong arms about her there and then or as soon thereafter as circumstances allow. As to the lady, of course she falls in love on the spot. Let's see.

Ed Rourke, patrolman, was travelling nights out in the tall grass. He had transgressed and had been transferred. He had arrested a rowdy with the wrong uncle, or a drunk with a drag, or an alderman's private secretary, and for the good of the service he had been assigned to a station where it took him two days every day to go to work from where he lived.

Ed was married. His wife was a girl from his own parish, and he had known her a long time. They had

married without much flurry or furlough. Their home life was honest (some part of a policeman's life must be honest) and tranquil and unexciting.

Rourke had entered the police service through a longing for adventure. He preferred it to becoming a plumber's helper or a motorman. He wanted to hunt thieves and raid opium dens and shoot burglars caught in the act. And here he was, out where he got burrs on the tails of his blue coat, pacing for hours up and down cold, dark, residential streets where nothing ever happened.

Everything out in that neighborhood closed for the night before he got there for duty. No thieves were ever crazy enough to go so far out. It wasn't a fashionable suburb—one never even saw a taxi there.

Only one incident lighted up the nightly travel. On the 2:42 car each night came Millie Pringle, a little waitress who worked downtown in a lunchroom until two o'clock. Ed had met her one night when he saw her get off the car and start up a dark street, alone. He addressed her and offered uniformed escort. She readily accepted. So Ed found out that she made that car nightly except Sunday, and he suggested that he had better be there each night and see that she got safely home over the two and a half blocks of desolate

sidewalk. Millie said, gee, it would be fine if he would.

The only good look that Ed ever got of her was as she alighted, when in the flare of the street-car platform lights he noted that she was prettily put together, chubby, smiling, with nice white teeth and nice pink lips and that she could not be more than about nineteen. He liked her walk, too, which was brisk and cute, and her talk, which was the what's what in the latest refined slang. She chewed her gum gracefully, she wore blue boots with white heels, and, generally speaking, she was the kind of a girl who would do anybody proud, anywhere.

Not a word had Ed spoken that would not have passed muster had Millie's mother been along. But there was somewhat in her smile as she caught his face each night, looking ahead while the car ground and grounded at the crossing, that led Ed to suspect that Millie had noticed his broad shoulders, his curly brown hair that showed beneath the white military police cap, and his smooth young face which could be looked at without annoyance.

When she smiled he smiled right back, giving tooth for tooth and eye for eye. And Millie knew, likewise, that each dimple registered, that the cocky little hat

set off her round face tellingly, and that any man might be proud to take her to the movies.

But no diplomatic messages had been exchanged. Rourke was entirely within his duties, lending to a lone girl police convoy at that hour, and Millie could accept it in turn without compromise. They talked of the weather and suffrage and President Wilson's marriage and the fact that Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year came pretty close together—and that was all. Millie had told him what she did for a living and that she was the only daughter of a widow—and that was all. Ed had told her that he came to pound the suburban flagstones because he was in Dutch at headquarters—and that was all.

And then one night Ed hurried, as he did every night, to make the car after his 2:30 pull at a box six blocks away. Millie got off. He was just about to join her, but she, quietly and without turning her face toward him at all, said out of the corner of her pretty little mouth, "Nix." Ed stepped back a pace to get a better focus, for he was puzzled. Then he noted that a man had gotten off the car at the same corner, a pace behind the girl. That was unusual in the wilderness.

Ed saw the man, but the man did not see Ed. His

eyes were fixed on the girl, who started up her dark street. As she mounted to the walk he stepped rapidly beside her and took her arm in his hand. With an angry motion Millie swept her arm out of his gingery grasp, turned toward Ed, and called: "Officer."

Ed made it in two steps. The man saw him, turned white, started to go, stopped and stood frozen. Ed took him by the collar.

"What's the matter?" demanded Ed, addressing the girl.

"This goof," said Millie hotly, "made a play for me in the rest'rant. I never gave him a tumble. But he waits around till I get off and tails me on that car and takes a seat acrost from me and gives me the all-over like he was gonna buy me or something. I wasn't gonna make no riot on that car, so I let him step right into this. Now, where do we go from here? Or do I have to let a lop-eared chicken chaser like this run me all over town and get away with it?"

Ed tightened his grip on the fellow's collar.

"It isn't so, officer," said the prisoner. "I thought I knew the young lady. That is—I saw her in the restaurant, and as I was going up the same way I was about to suggest that as it is dark——"

"Dark, is it?" said Policeman Rourke, and with his free hand he slapped the masher across the mouth, drawing blood. "Live up here, do you?" and he smacked him again. Then with the hand that gripped the coat Rourke gave the unwelcome stranger a shove that landed him in the middle of the dusty roadway in a heap.

Rourke followed to the edge of the sidewalk.

"If I ever ketch you annoyin' this here young lady again or mashin' on my beat I'll bust your nut and I'll run you in," said Rourke, and he turned and took Millie's arm and led her along toward her home.

Millie looked up at Ed's strong shoulders in his well-fitting blue uniform. Her little hand stole up on his arm and the spot it squeezed was as hard as Bessemer.

"You're a bear," she said with feeling.

"It's that kind o' roaches makes me wanna do murder," said Rourke. "I didn't wanna take him in becuz you would o' had to go to court an' so would I, an' the only way I could get to court at nine in the mornin' out here would be to sleep in the station four hours, an' then I'd get home just in time to be too late to start back this here way again. But I guess he won't worry you no more after this."

"Anybody what thinks he will, a dime'll get him rich," said Millie with more feeling.

Millie gave him her hand—the first time—that night when they parted at the gate. And Ed took it. And he noticed that she had a soft little hand, though a working girl, and that when he closed his big paw over it it felt so warm and snugly that he just kept it there until he suddenly remembered that such things mean something and he let go of it with suddenness and vigor, raised his cap, and said:

"Well, good-night. I guess he won't worry you no more after this."

"Anybody what thinks he will, a dime'll get him rich," said Millie, who had her set phrase for each emotion.

Ed watched her down the black passageway to the rear door where she always slipped into the house, then he turned and strolled back toward the main avenue to meet the next car, from which the conductor always tossed him an early morning paper.

He was feeling pretty good. It had been an adventure and he had been a knight. The monotony had been broken and so had the ice.

He wondered—yes, he smiled, then frowned, then whistled once, then smiled again and wondered.

What would she say if she knew he was married? He hadn't told her that he wasn't. Maybe she suspected. It wasn't hard to suspect it. But, no. Girls never suspect it. Say—they don't even believe it when a fellow tells them so.

And to some, again, it doesn't make any difference. That love thing is a funny sketch. A woman will let herself go, get herself all in love and wrapped up in a man she knows she can't have, follow him around like a devoted little slave when all the time she knows another woman has him—but that's how they are, those girls. So thought Ed as he strolled—and as he smiled.

The next night was Sunday, so he wasn't to meet Millie. But he strolled past her house three times, telling himself that he had to patrol that block, the same as any other block, didn't he? As late as midnight he saw a light in the house. But he couldn't see in. He wondered what they were doing up so late. But what mattered? He would ask her next day.

All next evening Ed found himself looking at his watch. He wasn't impatient for 2:42—nothing like that. But he just didn't want to miss that pull at the box and the girl would be scary and timid now

that she had been molested, so he mustn't fail in his duty to her. No, by all means he mustn't fail. So he was there and waiting when the headlight of the car swung into view and standing at the crossing walk as the platform stopped there.

Ed lifted his hat and beamed up at the step where stood Millie, with a smile on her face, looking radiant.

Ed reached up to help her off when—Suffering Disorderly Conduct!—the masher stepped out from behind Millie, put his two feet on the ground, reached up and offered his uplifted hand to Millie. Ed pulled his cap firmly on his head and with one quick motion drew back his right arm. Millie jumped down, threw up both her hands before Officer Rourke between him and the masher.

"Cut it out," said Millie sharply.

Ed stopped, his swing halting in midair. The conductor rang his two bells and the car pulled away.

"What the——" gasped Ed.

"You lay off that party," said Millie.

"Why, that's——"

"Never you mind who he is. You'll find out mighty quick who he is," and she turned to the well-dressed little man, "Arthur," she said to him, "tip this fresh harness bull off to what you think he oughta get

wise to before they make kindlin' wood outta his hickory."

"Why," started the little man, clearing his throat nervously, "I am Senator Carberry, member of the state legislature from this district, and——"

"Not 'Franchise Carberry?'" exclaimed Rourke.

"They sometimes call me that," said the little man.

"Why, then—then you're the boss o' this distric'—an' you——"

"You have nothing to fear, officer," said Carberry, "I have no desire to punish you, though you do take a great deal for granted for just a common patrolman, and you are too handy with your hands for a public servant."

"But you was——"

"He was not," cut in Millie. "He was eating in the rest'rant and he sees me and—well, I guess if a party sees a party he likes—well, I guess he's got a right to get acquainted, ain't he?"

Rourke began to see it—slowly.

"Miss Pringle tells me," said the senator, "that you are dissatisfied with your assignment out here. Now, instead of having you disciplined, as I well might and as perhaps I really ought to, I am going to do you

a friendly turn. Miss Pringle has told me that you have been of service to her—in your way, as every dutiful patrolman should be to a lady—so I have arranged that you be transferred back to your old post downtown. You will be notified in the morning that it has been ordered.”

Ed looked at Millie. Millie looked at Carberry.

“Well, I’m—I’m much ’bliged,” stuttered Rourke. “That is, if the lady thinks she can get home all right nights like——”

“You should worry your poor old nut about me,” said Millie. “I ain’t gonna be flipping rattlers nights no more. I’m gonna—we’re gonna—Senator Carberry and I are gonna——”

Rourke staggered back a step. Carberry offered his arm to Millie, who cast an indignant and impudent glance at Rourke, turned lovingly a smile of precipitated sugar toward the senator, and started with him for the curb.

“You will be notified of your transfer in the morning,” called the senator over his shoulder.

“Leave it to him—if he says transfer you they’ll hop you wherever he says,” tossed Millie over her shoulder.

“Thanks,” said Rourke, coming out of his daze.

The couple had made the sidewalk and Rourke was forty feet away. He took three big steps, put his two hands about his mouth to make a megaphone and called after them, clearly and distinctly, "Thank you, miss. And my wife'll be much obliged, too."



VI

OMAHA SLIM

I. HEARD NATURE CALLING HIM


II. INDORSED BY LUKE THE DUDE

(Political Philosophy of Omaha Slim.)

III. SNIFFS SCENTED BREEZES

IV. ON INTERNATIONAL CRISIS





VI

OMAHA SLIM

I

HEARD NATURE CALLING HIM

OMAHA SLIM, having shilled a night owl for a dime, repaired him to the lodging-house of his choice, bowed to the fuzzy gentry lounging about the lobby, and laid down the night's receipts for the night's resting-place.

It had no canopy, and the linen cannot be described because there wasn't any.

Where Slim did his sleeping, when he was lucky, each patron gets six feet on a pine bench about two feet from the floor. The sections are shiny and worn from occupation and there are grooves at the head, foot, and centre.

The pillow rests on a hinged shelf connected with a rope to a lever in the office. Promptly at 6 o'clock the lever is pulled, all the headpieces drop, and no guest has to be called twice, nor does he stop to say, "All right—in a minute, dear," then turn over again

for that postscript snooze which is all that makes getting up at all worth while.

With his head hanging and dangling, Slim knew that it was time to arise. The other 'bos knew it, too. They reached under their bunks, got their hats, which constituted dressing for the day, and shambled downstairs, where something else awaited to compensate for time lost and dime lost in sleeping.

They call it "the rub of the brush" in that world to which Slim belongs. They call it that because that's the way it feels when it goes down.

Shaking and white-faced, the tramps filed sleepily into the barroom and lined against the mile of bar. The bartender had a solid circle of glasses before him, each holding half a pint, and into these he was pouring from two bottles, one held in each hand, time being more valuable than the stuff he poured and spilled. And everywhere it spilled it ate a knot out of the bar.

Slim took his and threw it down his throat. It felt as though it had barbed wire in it and it shook him from his toes to his hat. The kick was between the two. When it had settled Slim lifted his head, swelled out his racked chest, walked forth into the sunlight and sat down on a keg.

He sat there until the policeman turned the corner toward him. Slim didn't wait for an invitation. He arose and proceeded.

Now you would think Slim's first thought would be of breakfast. But it was not. Breakfast had passed out of his life with other customs that the fortunate regard as necessities of life. He no more thought of eating than of opera.

Slim had not slept as well as usual. He had dreamed, and that was something that seldom happened.

He had dreamed of his mother and of the farm where he had lived. Slim never had loved that farm. In boyhood it meant getting up before the sun, milking, ploughing, and chopping wood. In adolescence it had meant more of the same. In manhood it had galled him until he struck out for himself years ago to seek success and embrace failure.

But, in retrospect, the farm had reappeared. And it had changed. His mother—she must be pretty old by now—came to him, and she was kind and sweet. It was early fall—harvest time. That meant work, and even in his dream Slim had shuddered. But after the harvesting would be the gatherings and the barn dances and the hard times parties. The girls he had

known—my, most of them must be women now, with children and such—would be there.

Slim's sense of the dramatic struck him now that he was awake. Why not walk in on them at the hard times party, enter thus on a laugh, win the envy of them all for his realistic disguise, and tell no one but his mother where he had been and what he had done? The farm could take care of him. He could return to a decent life and perhaps he could learn to like it. This hoboing had its compensations, but it got one nowhere, and it was not any more socially elegant than living on a farm. Why not?

Slim was not the man to jump at a conclusion or a delusion. His was by nature a slow and careful process of determination. He thought of several sides of the proposition, and, taken from the several points of survey, back to nature looked like the goods.

So he started for the freight-yards, where, he knew, trains left in the direction of his old home.

He dug down into his coat and brought up the stub of a cigar, but he had no match. He was passing a railroad station near the yards. In stations there are always cigar stands, and, swinging at cigar stands, there are always lights. A station, moreover, is a place where a person dressed as Slim was could

enter without probability of coming out at the end of a boot. So he entered for his light. He got it.

In the station there always is a "men's waiting-room." Nobody ever waits there except section hands, harvest hands, and soldiers returning from furlough. Slim knew there was security and sanctuary in the men's waiting-room, so he thought he'd stop there for a smoke and a think and a rest.

He sat down on a bench with a high, curved wooden back and high, carved wooden arms at its extremities. He crossed his legs and puffed and contemplated.

On the bench opposite him sat a crew of foreigners, jabbering and gesticulating. They were entirely surrounded with picks, shovels, lunch, and cheap pipe smoke. One of them, a foreman or colonel or something above the mob, was standing with his hands down in his horizontal trousers pockets. One of the gang pointed to Slim and whispered something to his chief, who turned, looked him over, and crossed to him.

"How you lika come in country worka on de sekcha?" he asked.

Slim looked up at him, slid down the bench a bit, arose, and walked to the other end of the waiting-room and sat on another bench.

Across from him sat another gang. Some of it could and did talk English. He had just settled in a comfortable curve when one of the men, who likewise seemed to have preferment over his fellows, arose and came to him.

"Say, 'bo," he said, "I gotta gang o' harvest hustlers here an' we kin use more. T'ree bucks a day an' chuck an' dere's plenny o' work. If ye wanna do a couple o' overtime tricks ye kin lay up fer all winter. On?"

Slim picked himself up, blinked, and moved to another corner of the room. There he sat down and faced a squad of lumberjacks, so he moved to the fourth and remaining corner, where he fell among a horde of labourers on their way to build a dam on some river somewhere. They looked happy and dirty. Their overalls were worn and rubbed and their spades were wrapped up in their lamb-lined weather jackets.

Slim didn't even sit down near them. One of them was eating slices of raw onion on dark rye bread, and Slim's nostrils were tender on an empty stomach.

Slim started out. All he could see was shovels and picks. All he could hear was the excited chatter of a babel of rough men waiting for cattle cars and smelly

smokers to take them to work. Work! The air seemed charged with it. The place was blue with it. Slim wanted a bit of fresh air and a look at people who knew the values of things.

He thought of the ride on the bumpers and the night that would come on, when it would be cold and comfortless and cramped. He thought of rain which probably would accompany him and be with him when he got home. There wasn't any calf to be fatted on the farm where he lived, and maybe his brother, who had worked all his life and had a wife and two children to keep from the fruits of that stingy farm, might not bid him welcome.

His eye lighted on something. He stooped and picked it up, looked about him, and saw no one had seen. He bit it. It was good. It was a quarter. His feet were still taking him toward the yards. He heard a noise, looked up and saw the train that he was going to flip pulling out. He looked at the quarter again.

"A dime for grub, a nickel for a rub o' de brush, a dime for a flop on de kip and a rub o' de brush in de mornin'—in me mitt—an' I wuz on me way. Guess I'm losin' me mind," he said.

He turned and saw the gang of section hands piling

into a line of shabby coaches with their tools and their paper telescopes and their bundles. The foreman was the last, seeing all his men in before he grasped the handrail and started up himself. Slim was passing him.

"Hey," called Slim. "When I wakes up in me hotel t'morrer mornin' I'll be glad I ain't wit youse, ye bunch o' fawraners."

II

INDORSED BY LUKE THE DUKE (Political Philosophy of Omaha Slim)

Omaha Slim came out of the lodging-house and blinked at the pale sun of budding spring.

Within him, tearing like the freshets of a mountain falls, raged the half pint of squirrel whiskey (it makes you climb a tree) that had just gurgled its carbolic way down his main tunnel—the "rub o' the brush," as it is called in slum parlance, descriptive of the way it feels going down.

Omaha Slim, the fattest bum on the highway of his kind, sat him upon a keg at the sidewalk's edge and addressed Luke the Dude, who was distinguished among the hobos because he carried a pocket comb

and, from time to time, would take off his worn and shiny crusher and caressingly comb his shock.

"Luke," said Slim, "this is a great little world. Between now an' 'lection you an' I we're as carefree as Cain an' Abel in Paradise."

"Uhum," said Luke.

"There ain't no use'n talkin'—politics was made for the likes o' you an' me. The one thing what our fathers battles for an' dies for is this here right o' free-born Americans for to vote. They's a lot o' smart suckers what kicks us an' hotfoots us every time we stops to rest all the other mont's o' the year. But comes 'lection, we're as good as Rockefeller, ain't we?"

"Uhum," said Luke, combing his hair.

"We're better'n Rockefeller. Nobody knows how he's agonna vote an' nobody much gives a blow. But they knows how you an' I is agonna vote. An' they needs us. They jus' can't get by wit'out us. Ain' it the truth?"

"Uhum," said Luke.

"This here ward," said Omaha Slim, shifting his right foot off his left foot and his left foot over on his right foot; "this here ward is like a gold dollar. Its value never changes. You know where it is an'

where it's agonna be, day in, day out. An' who makes it that way, huh?"

Luke ran the comb through his hair and put the comb back in his pocket.

"We makes it that way," said Omaha Slim. "You an' me an' the rest o' the boys. We're a steady value. We never flucjuates. We can be depended on. We are depended on. They ain't hardly a gink in all the town outside o' he's got a p'litical job or he's one of us what can be depended on. What good is a guy's vote when you don't know how he's agonna vote? When nobody don' know how a guy is agonna vote what can he do wit' his vote? Who'll trust him? But wit' our vote it's diff'rent. They knows. They can figger ahead. When they buy us they're buyin' somethin' that's old an' reliable an' standard like a gold dollar. So many votes so many bucks. We knows how much we gets; they knows how many they gets. It's business, that's what it is. It's system. It's commercial soundness, figger-proof an' reg'lar."

"Uhum," said Luke.

"An' what's the answer? The answer is that 'way up in politics they figger us 'way ahead in the future. The administration knows we're gonna be here.

They knows who we're agonna vote for. They knows who we vote for is agonna get in. They knows who gets in by our vote is agonna be wit' the administration. Do we amount to somethin'? Or are we a lot o' no-good 'bos like preachers an' guys what ain't got enough interest in their own town to study important politics says we are? Or are we?"

"Uhum," said Luke, taking out his comb.

"I puts in my eight good hours on the flop in there las' night. I gets my rub o' the brush this mornin'. I got 40 cents jinglin' in my kick an' when that there's gone I can raise a two-bit piece in headquarters. 'Lecture is comin' an' the coppers has been officed not to give us the rush. Is this here livin'? Or ain't it?"

"Uhum," said Luke.

"I sees the big feller las' night—you know, the alderman. He's got a dime cigar in his teeth an' he's got a smile like a picher o' Teddy Roosewild. He looks the boys over an' he shakes his head like he's sayin' to hisself, he's sayin': 'Them's my boys—some boys!' He don' say it, but I can see he thinks it. An' then what does he do? He walks up to the bar like the big, fine gent what he is an' he barks to the bottle-juggler: 'Gi' the boys all a drink.' They

was a panic, nearly, us gettin' to the hardwood. The barkeep he gets two dozen glasses an' he slaps 'em on the bar. He pulls 'em together wit' his two arms in a solid circle. He takes two bottles o' that two-year-old—the real stuff—an' he pours wit' bot' hands. It was rich booze. 'Drink hearty,' says the Boss. An' hearty was right. Was you there?"

"Uhum," said Luke, sliding the comb back into his pocket.

"Did you read in the paper what that there woman gets in the prim'ry? Say—I picks a paper outta one o' them keep-the-city-clean cans an' I gets the official figgers. It was a shame to do it to her. But it'll teach them women a lesson after a while. It'll show 'em politics ain' no place for 'em. Politics is a man's game. Could that there woman a' came into that there place over there an' said, 'Gi' the boys all a drink?' Could she? Well, until she can, politics ain' no place for 'er. Anyway, in this here ward or any other ward what's run on a system an' not in that haphazard guessin' contest way what they does it in some o' them swell wards where everybody argues an' nobody knows how it's agonna come out. Them swell guys they wouldn't run their business like they runs their politics. They ain' no guessin'

about their business. They frames that ahead—knows every angle 'way in advance, how it's gonna finish before they starts it. But their politics is slipshod. They takes chances on who is agonna be their alderman where they wouldn' take no chances on who's gonna be their office boy. Am I crazy? Or are you lis'nin' at all?"

"Uhum," said Luke.

"No, sir," said Omaha Slim. "Politics is a game for men—for smart men at that. An' the guy what gets along in it is the guy what frames ahead an' counts noses an' busts noses if they don' count right. It ain't no pastime for kid-glove Willies an' for women. Votin' don' do no good. That's peanut stuff—retail pennyante. Roundin' up a t'ousan' voters—more than that—that's wholesale. An' that's business. An' that there gets results an' brings home the pork an' the bacon. It takes a general what's been trained from the gutter up, not a amachoor what runs a bank or a butcher shop most o' the time an' then tries to run politics on the side when he ain' too busy. Them rich parties calls us bums. But we makes bums outta them on 'lection day."

"Uhum," said Luke, reaching for his comb.

"Nix," said Omaha Slim. "You won't have time. I'm gonna buy. Are you wit' me?"

"Betcher life—and your dope is all aces, too," said Luke, letting the comb fall back into his pocket.

III

SNIFFS SCENTED BREEZES

"This is the time o' year," said Omaha Slim from atop his keg, as he stretched his feet farther out upon the sidewalk in front of the barrel-house, "when I begins to feel lazy. In winter, when the breeze crimps a party an' everything is shootin' around, I got plenny o' pep to panhandle a few. But in spring I gets fine an' lazy an' I jus' wanna loaf."

"Sure," said Sleepy Brannigan.

"When it's cold," insisted Omaha Slim, "an' many a night I carries the banner, keepin' on my dogs so I won' freeze to death, then sometimes I wisht I would of tooken up some kind o' work. But aroun' this here time o' year when the lilies begins to open up an' 'lections is in the air an' it gets warm enough to sleep in a park, I should worry about soilin' my mitts with drudgery."

"You're right," said Sleepy Brannigan.

"I'm nuts about nacher," said Slim. "I'm cer-

t'nly stuck on nacher. This mornin' I'm comin' outta that there alley, an' over in a corner where you wouldn't think nothin' could grow epsept rats an' swill, doggone my bleary old eye if I don' see a couple o' blades o' grass. Now, you know, that's mighty swell, that is. I alwus did like grass aroun' where I lives.

"Y'know, I was raised on a farm. My people was well off. My ol' man stands great out where we lives. My brother Tom he's married an' he goes to church. I got a sister, too, somewhere. Oh, I wasn' born no 'bo. I could of be a prosp'rous Reub with whiskers over my ears an' drive my own Ford, I guess, maybe.

"But I'm periodical. That's it—periodical. Y'see a farmer is got to shovel his way t'rough snow in winter an' in spring he's gotta plow. Now, in spring this here love o' nature an' this here feelin' like loafin' alwus got me. An' in winter I alwus wanted to see life—be in the big cities, where things was movin'. In winter I couldn't stand no farm, becus it was cold an' lonesome. An' in spring I was off it on account o' the plowin'. If they would of let me alone, so I could tour in winter an' come home an' rest t'rough the warm months, I wouldn't have no grudge again

the farm, an' I'd go home as fast as a way-freight'd carry me. But if I got home to-morrer mornin' the ol' man'd have me between a pair o' plow-handles before I had time to kiss my ol' lady howdy-do."

"'Tain't square," said Sleepy Brannigan.

"No, sir. It ain't. But farmers is funny that way. They don' make no allowance for diff'rent leanin's in their children. Now, if my ol' man would of be a city guy, he'd ask me: 'Son, what would you like to be?' An' I'd answer: 'Papa, I wanna be a judge, or a artist, or a alderman—something refined like that.' An' I'd get a chance to foller my own ways an' get to be somebody. But a boy what's born on a farm there ain't no out. He's gotta push a plow an' milk an' pull weeds.

"Now, I wasn' born for no work like that. My ol' lady comes from a artistic fam'ly. Her grandfather was a interior decorator an' sign-painter. I must of took after him. Now, what's the use o' sentencing a lad what's born with a burnin' for art to saw wood? I wouldn' stand for it. So I vamped."

"You done right," said Sleepy Brannigan.

"Tom, he never didn' know nothin' epsept sleepin', gettin' up, eatin' like a wolf, tearin' up a few acres o'

fine nacher, an' goin' back to sleep. With me it was all diff'rent. I could stand an' watch him toil an' I'd say, 'What a picher that'd make!' 'Specially in spring. As soon as the air got soft an' croony I begin to see pichers. Well, they wasn' no much encouragement for picher work aroun' where I lives. So, when I says to my ol' man I wan's to go to a city an' study to draw pichers he says go to the well an' draw a bucket o' water.

"That's the kind o' treatment I got. My ol' lady, she alwus kind o' sympathied with me. You see it was t'rough her I got my finer feelin's. But she didn' amount to much aroun' my house epsept when it come time to serve the coffee an' cakes. A farmer's wife runs No. 2 to a farmer's cow. Oncet or twicet she talked up for me an' my ol' man told her she was crazy an' to go wash the dishes.

"So I packs up my few belongin's an' a suit of o' Tom's clo's an' I beats it."

"What else could you do?" asked Sleepy Branigan.

"Since then I've had a lot o' ups an' downs—mostly downs. I tried to get work, but in the big towns when a fat hog what's got dough in every bank kicks in eight a week to you, he wan's you to break

your neck. I was asked to do the most unreasonable kinds o' work—truckin' cases, harnessin' teams, washin' winders—say, I could of just as well stayed on the farm where I come from.

"I couldn' find no artistic work. For a while I was markin' shippin' boxes, but I paints one to Newfoundland instead o' New Zealand, an' you oughta heard the fuss. I was docked an' canned. I wouldn't stand for it, so I resigns. You know what temp'rament is? Well, never mind. It goes with a soul for art. You wouldn't know if I told you.

"All that made me sore on humanity an' civilization. If I was born with that kind of a disposition that wasn' my fault, was it? If I felt like musin' an' thinkin' poetry in the glad springtime I couldn' help it, could I?

"You couldn't take a antelope—a wild, free creacher of its native hills—an' hitch it up like a mule to pull a garbage cart, could you?

"Well, what was the use o' trying to make a farmer or a freight handler outta me? Huh?"

Omaha Slim waited for a reply, and, getting none, looked down to where Sleepy Brannigan was sitting on the curb, his back leaning against the keg on which Slim sat. Sleepy's head had fallen forward

limply. He was snoring like a fondly tortured saxophone.

Slim shook his head. He drew himself together with a gradual effort and rolled to his feet. He looked down again at Sleepy, whose fat jowls rested on his collarless shirt and whose ragged beard stuck out like quills upon the fretful porcupine.

"What a piccher that'd make!" reflected Slim.

Then he walked around the keg and sat down on the curb. He leaned back and rested against the unoccupied portion of the support. He looked for a moment at the blue, fair sky of spring; he breathed in the new air of the young, budding season. He sighed. In two minutes he was dreaming of flowers, flannel cakes, and fairies.

IV

ON INTERNATIONAL CRISIS

Omaha Slim sat on the curb, casting a rotund shadow toward the front elevation of his residence, club and office, the dime flop over the barrel-house.

Beside him half sat, half lay Luke the Dude, his legs extending into the street, snipping with a petite pair of rusted manicure scissors the fringe from the bottom of his trousers.

Every now and then some, Luke stopped, laid his scissors down on the stone, reached into an inner pocket and drew forth his comb, took off his devastated hat and ran the comb through what had survived of his hair.

"Dude," said Omaha Slim, "these here is excitin' times."

"Mouthful," said Luke, closing one eye and slanting a sighting to the bottom of the left barrel of his trousers to see whether he had trimmed off a cotton hangnail or had cut into the quick.

"The air is full o' germs," said Slim. "Full o' germs o' war. Over there is a pennuant floatin' to our native breeze an' it says: 'Help Get Villa.' That there soldier is been pacin' up an' down now for weeks tryin' to steer suckers in to go again the most popular national game o' the season.

"Then I reads that the President has declared war again Germany."

"Go easy," said Luke, putting up the scissors and taking down the comb. "He didn' pull no war. He jus' busts off dipsomaniac relations, which is like tellin' a guy to beat it, but that don't say you hit him in the nose."

"If you're gonna split hairs," said Slim, "all right.

But I tell you they's war in this here air. An' when the air is full o' war that's when us 'bos begins to get a little attention.

"Aroun' 'lection time an' war time this here nation can't make a move without us.

"Where do they start enlistin' campaigns? Does they go to the bullyvards? Does they? Does they send circ'ler letters to bankers an' brokers an' shoe clerks an' tango dancers? Yes, they does. They sticks out a banner where you an' I can read. They sends a male model with a khakeye uniform an' a someboyrearo to walk in front of us an' make us jealous an' warlike.

"Who is the first to enlist? Is it mamma's naughty boy with his hair shaved off over his ears? Is it? It is not. It's us. You an' me. Well, anyway, guys like you an' me. Our set.

"When it comes to parades them counter-leapers an' silk-pajama youths come staggerin' out o' candy stores an' fall in line. But when it comes to war Uncle Sam hollers for reg'lers. He ain't got no time then for expert accountants an' commercial bunko men. He wants fighters. An' who is the fighters? Us."

"Well," said Luke, putting his comb back into the

imitation morocco envelope and slipping that into the pocket without the hole, "he figgers, Uncle Sam does, that we ain't got no business to keep us here, so maybe we'll be more willin' to spring into the breach."

"Where do you get that we ain't got no business here?" asked Slim, making no effort to conceal that he was hurt. "We ain't got no business? Ain't they a 'lection comin'? Ain't they gonna be some guy runnin' for President soon? An' for gov'nor?"

"Sure," said Luke, rubbing his thumbnail on his thigh.

"Very well," said Slim, convincingly and with satisfaction. "They's gonna be a 'lection. Well, who's gonna 'lect the President? An' the gov'nor? Who? You an' I an' the likes o' you an' I. Is that havin' business, or ain't it?"

"Is it more important to get a musket an' a shave an' thirteen a month an' your beans in the field o' battle, or is it more important to stay here an' elect a President an' a gov'nor? Or ain't it?"

Luke the Dude pulled up his left foot and rubbed the face of the shoe on the rear portion of his right trouser, took it down again, looked it over with

critical severity, put a silent O. K. on the shine, reached for his comb, and said:

"Slim, I never t'ought o' them things that way. You got a head for politics an' the affairs o' nashuns an' I ain't. But the way you puts it, it's a question. It's a problem, that's what it is.

"They ain't no gettin' out o' this: We got to pick between duty an' duty. A citizen is got to choose between his civic an' his militarious conscience at a time like this. It's too much for me."

"I'll tell you," said Slim. "My way o' lookin' at it is this.

"They's a war on in Mexico right now. Of course it's only a war again one man, but he's a tough bird, even if he's dead, an' while many is laughin', it ain't no laughin' matter.

"On the other hand, we're gonna be fightin' Germany as sure as mud. That'll take a lot o' men. Figgerin' one American to four Dutch, we'll need not less than 300,000 soldiers.

"Now they's prob'ly just about 300,000 'bos in America to-day. So that's tooken care of if they enlists, man for man.

"But, if they does, bein' a patriotic lot, you know what'll happen.

"The money classes, they don' want no war over here. That kills trade. They wants a war in Europe and them here to rake the kitty. But if we boys goes off to war an' leaves them guys here to do the votin' you know what they'll about do. They'll vote in some guy without a chin, who's got one foot in Wall Street an' the other in the grave, an' he'll horn in the White House an' he'll call off the war.

"So, if we put over a war, we leave our retreat unguarded an' along comes this here tool o' the malleafactors an' he puts the hull war on the bum."

"Gee," said Luke. "You can see them things a good ways ahead an' mighty straight. You should o' been a deputy sheriff or somethin' in the way of a public career," and he adjusted his necktie so that the hole would be hidden in the knot.

"I got the low-down on the sichooation," said Slim, happy to be understood and appreciated. "An' here's the way out of it. Since they is a equal need for to go in the bloody fields to fight an' to stay home for protectin' the honor, policy, an destiny o' this here gov'ment, a fifty-fifty cut is the answer.

"Half of us is got to go to war. Then the country can make up the diff'rence by enlistin' 150,000 mechanics an' college boys. That'll leave 150,000 of us

behind here to swing the votin', as 150,000 men what can be relied on can do a great deal again a disorganized mass o' voters what splits tickets. In the same breath, the 150,000 of us on them bivouacs o' glory'll give a substantial foundation to the fightin' forces."

"You're a bear," said Luke, shooting a string-tied cuff.

"Tanks," said Slim. "An' you an' me not bein' experienced fighters, but bein' experienced voters an' men who can be depended on in a critical hour like is gonna face our country, we'll stay here an' do our end on 'lection day."





VII
THE IMP OF THE NIGHT



VII

THE IMP OF THE NIGHT

BETWEEN midnight and sunlight, when you are either flying home on the soft springs of your limousine or lying home on the soft springs of your bed—that is when they come out, the little imps of the night.

Tousled and sleepy they stumble into the section of skyscrapers with baskets on their arms and with smaller brothers hanging to their unwashed little hands.

They make no noise, for most of them are barefooted and those who are not might as well be.

They semi-sleep as they walk, these children of poverty, who beg the bread you leave and the scraps of food you push away.

For hours they wait in alleys and byways—hundreds of them—until the baby breadlines are served. Then they semi-sleep their way home again, each carrying two cents' worth of stale biscuits as the earn-

ings of a journey that few burglars would dare and a wait that few watchmen would endure.

They are, for the most part, children of foreigners. A great many of them are too young to go to school. It sounds incredible, but five-year-olds are not rare in the procession. They seldom are molested, but it is a natural impulse for the weak to fear the strong. When they see a policeman they shiver. When a man suddenly turns a corner toward them they huddle against a darkened window or the wall of a million-dollar building. When any one addresses them they grab hands and run piteously.

Their faces are ashen. Their limbs are lean and fragile. Their eyes say nothing and ask nothing. And they never beg anything but bread—yesterday's. They come and go and never say a word and seldom lift their eyes.

You who sleep at night never have seen them. It is deep in the night before they reach downtown from the slums in which they live. Their tired little feet have brought them back before you turn over for that last luxurious snooze. Only night owls know them—these infant scavengers of the big city.

There was a night owl who had seen them for years and wondered why they did it.

Children are not good rebels. Children of men and women who had been hitched to plows in Bohemia or flogged muzhiks in Russia seem to be no rebels at all.

But the night owl asked himself what spark within these half-dead children carbureted the motive force that carried them over their nightly journeys—miles and hours.

He was an inquisitive night owl this bird. He wrote stories for a newspaper and asking questions long had been his business. He had asked presidents, champions, and suffragettes questions when he wished to know something of burning moment. So, why not ask these little camels of the city's desert caravan?

He stood between the pillars before a big hotel. Down the street came a little girl with a frock that had once been gingham but now was nothing. She wore no shoe nor sock. The baby had shoes and socks. The baby was beside her, too tired to hold her hand, so the larger one, who must have been fully eight years old, was dragging the baby, sex doubtful, by the sleeve. In the other hand the guide and leader held a basket.

The night owl stepped forth and as gently as he

might cornered the pair, driving them to cover in a nook between one pillar and a wall. He stood before them where they could not flee. The larger one might have made it, but she couldn't desert the baby. So she turned up her very gray eyes and bit her lip.

"What's your name, little girl?" asked the night owl.

"Jennie," said she, with a clutch in her throat, for she was badly scared.

"And the little girl's name?"

"Mike," she said.

"What would you do if I gave you a nickel?" asked the night owl, with a night owl's axiomatic and automatic instinct that enough nickels pave a nickel-plated road to anywhere.

"I'd give it to ma," said the child.

"What do you do with the bread you get every morning?"

"I give it to my ma."

"Who sends you downtown like this every morning?"

"Nobody—I just come."

"Who sent you in the first place?"

"My ma."

"What's your last name?"

"Dombrowsky."

"Here's a dollar," said the night owl. "Now I'll tell you what we'll do. The bread you bring home every day can't be worth over two cents. Let's call it five to be sure. Now this dollar is twenty times five cents. You can give it to your ma. And then you needn't come downtown like this again for twenty days. Do you understand?"

"No," said the child.

"Would you stay home like—well, doggone it, like my children—and sleep every night if I gave you a nickel a night?"

"If I stayed at home, where would I get the nickel?"

"I'll give it to you now—enough for twenty days. You tell me where you live and every twenty days I'll send you twenty nickels. Do you understand now?"

"No," said Jennie.

"Just a minute," said the night owl. "I have an idea. Now, don't run away. I won't hurt you. Wait right here."

He dashed to the all-night drug-store and got a dollar bill changed into twenty five-cent pieces. He dashed back again and found Jennie hurrying along with Mike by the sleeve.

He was disappointed, but he ran after them and cornered them again.

Mike went back to sleep and Jennie waited.

"Here," said the night owl. "Here are twenty nickels. Now, you give one to your ma each day. Tell her a man gives you a nickel a day to stay home and sleep. If that isn't enough let me know. Here is my card. Do you understand? My name and address are on this card. Your ma or anybody can write me at that address and say a nickel a day isn't enough for Jennie to stay home and sleep. Then I'll send you more. Do you understand?"

"Yes," said Jennie.

"Fine," said the night owl.

She took the nickels and the card—a card which opened doors of mayors' and millionaires' offices.

"Now, where do you live?" asked the night owl.

"Grand Avenue and Green Street," said Jennie.

The night owl put down "Jennie Dombrowsky, Grand Avenue and Green Street," in his little notebook, below the private telephone number of the chief of police and the address at which a certain politician could be reached if a hurry call were necessary at night.

"Now run along," said the night owl.

Jennie woke up Mike and they walked along.

Nineteen days later the night owl made an afternoon visit to Grand Avenue and Green Street.

He asked for the Dombrowskys and was directed up a smelly flight of stairs to a door. He knocked and a fat woman with her sleeves rolled up answered.

As she opened the door he saw Mike in a corner, asleep on the floor.

"Where's Jennie?" asked the night owl.

"What do you want from Jennie?" asked the fat woman.

"I'm the man who gives her the nickels—I want to give her some more," he said.

"Give," said the woman. He gave her twenty nickels. She put them in her apron pocket.

"Jennie—" she said, "Jennie was killed by a truck three days ago when she was walking downtown after bread."

And she slammed the door.





VIII

TAXI, MISTER!



VIII

TAXI, MISTER!

WHEN a keen newspaper reporter wants to find out anything of what is going on in his town he sees the police, buzzes the night clerk in the owl drug-store, quizzes the dog watch bell boy in the papier-maché hotel—then he wigwags his friend the taxi driver (every orthodox reporter should have one) and says, "How about this?" And then he finds out nothing.

The taxicab men of a big city carry more fatal secrets than any other class—some say more than all other classes. A good front-seat man never looks into a woman's face, never turns around after or during the process of slipping in between the seat and the wheel, and never puts down an address.

Yet he sees the woman, hears and sees everything that transpires while his fare is riding, pretty nearly knows what happens after he gets his and the company's money. This goes for the uniformed man riding for an accredited corporation. The unat-

tached pirate who owns or leases his own cab is sometimes quite another story. He is oftentimes a dangerous man and has been known to——

However, we will take up the legitimate chauffeur, who has a number, who is called by a doorman with a whistle, and who gets 20 per cent. of his takings plus tips, which range from 20 per cent. to \$20.

He flourishes night and day. You may think that the restaurants, hotels and other places where romance may hide and dark deeds take place have their innings between sundown and the milkman, but they are just as mysterious and just as prolific between dawn and dinner. The taxi is such an impersonal affair that men chance it in the bright light of day, for a taxi has no identity.

Men who have limousines and chauffeurs of their own use taxicabs for private jaunts where they would not let their own untrusted wheelsman in on sub rosa data. A man or a woman may call a taxicab, leave home and go forth—where? Shopping, of course. After the taxi gets off the domestic street—well, a taxi has no identity, and a driver will go where directed.

A taximan need not find out for himself where any-

thing is. He need only go where he is told. No one patron will know all the places. But all the patrons he carries will in a short time have driven with him to all the places, so that he will have the concentrated shady knowledge of all the bloods, pikers, come-ons, roisterers, gamblers, cheaters, beaux, rich men's sons, and poor men's daughters.

Ask him who that man with the whiskers was who called him to the office building, had him wait at the tango retreat, reëntered with a pretty girl, drove her to the shabby boarding-house, had him wait, reëntered alone, and drove to that big house with the pillars where a butler lets him in. Ask him. He'll tell you he never saw the man before, hasn't any idea of who he might be, doesn't remember any such trip.

But if I ask him—I know him, for I have my one taxi driver who loves me—he will tell me. But he will not tell me the truth.

For taxi drivers, who are not paid very much, considering what they might collect, hang on to information like Chinese prisoners after a raid, from whom the star third-degree detective never got more than a shrug and a foolish grin.

With all this, the management of the big taxi cor-

poration trusts its drivers like a rural district trusts its congressman. He is tabbed by "spotters" that walk and peek from behind granite columns, buy rides, and watch for violations of rules, and seek to engage the uniformed chauffeurs in compromising conversations. The thing that the wise admiral of a taxi fleet makes clear is that there must be no gossip—no interchange of intimate news between the men or from the men to outsiders. No telegraph or 'phone company guards its fiduciary status more sacredly.

There is another spy system. An incredibly delicate and intricate mechanism operates with the meter. It is strung on fine wires and leads to a recording point which traces lines on a roll of paper. Every move of the taxi records something. If it starts, turns a corner, stops, goes on, turns about, speeds up, slows down—each twist shows.

At the end of the day the auditor opens the meter box and unrolls the paper. He spreads it before him and he can tell almost to a yard where and what time that taxi came and went, how fast it travelled here, there, and next place, which direction it took when it turned that corner, how long it waited there—almost the name of the man who got in.

The best-managed taxis have automatic arrange-

ments which cut off the gasoline supply when the machine is pressed beyond a certain speed—fixed usually at the municipal limit. The company refuses to pay fines. The chauffeur has to get himself out of trouble unless it hits him from behind.

The driver advances on a private civil-service routine. He gets no profitable hotel or theatre runs until he has done long years as an apprentice, carrying passengers in the suburbs and from depots and for open-air park tours. He must prove himself a man of discretion, silence, care, phlegmatic temperament, and—a wife. That is a rule. He must be married. No standard taxi company engages a single man as a driver. I don't know what happens if he becomes a widower or is divorced—maybe he's promoted. I don't know. But he has to be married when he mounts his seat. Marriage means stability, at least in theory. And successful is the man who finds theories and puts them into use.

All this is preliminary to the tale of Marty Taylor, skipper of a numbered, registered, polished taxicab stationed opposite the fastest downtown hotel from 6 P.M. nightly, taking its regular turn on calls at the door, where the starter gave command with a

whistle that racked the quiet pedestrian from ear to ear.

Marty had done his suburban sentence, had qualified, had driven on the money-run for two years without a serious mark against him, was married, and showed up a recording roll in his meter box every day that tallied and told no tales that embarrassed him. He drove seven nights the week, and on rainy nights, Saturday nights, New Year's eves, during auto shows, conventions of Moose, Owls, and Elks, was lucky, if he had time to grab a cup of Java and one of those up there, on a high stool in the lunchroom. It was the star taxi-call spot of the town.

He carried many. He remembered all. You may have been amazed to read of a detective who recognized a man he had arrested twenty years before in a crowd. But remember that that is the detective's principal business. You may wonder how a switchboard operator can carry 5,000 numbers in her head. She can't help it. Just that way Marty had nothing to do all the way out on each ride except speculate on who, where, and how regarding what was behind him, and all the way back he had nothing to do except speculate on why he and she went to that address.

So, when a mysterious party stepped up to Marty one evening and slipped him a paper, Marty unfolded it and read it by the front light of his cab and was thunderstruck to find that it was a subpoena to appear as a witness on behalf of a prominent merchant who had entered divorce proceedings versus his wife.

Marty knew—all about it. But how did the rich man know he had driven the drive? How had he been identified? Was it a random shot? Were all the drivers being subpoenaed on a chance or in an elimination to see which one had steered the lady on her wrong steer? It really was easy enough. The merchant had had private snoopers shadowing his wife and one of them had taken Marty's number.

Marty reported to his manager. The manager was too wise to advise him to violate an oath. He only shrugged his shoulders and remarked that if it got around that taxi drivers were being subpoenaed as divorce witnesses, and their testimony was important—well, people with ticklish journeys in mind would be taxi shy, naturally, wouldn't they? Marty admitted that they certainly would. "All right—let your conscience be your guide," said the manager.

"Leave it to me," said Marty, who then slept in a chair until time to go to court.

Marty was lodged in a witness-room off the court-room after he had reported to the attorney of the man who had subpoenaed him.

"Is this going to cost you any time—any work—I mean any earnings?" asked the attorney, privately.

"No," said Marty. "I don't want any money, if that's what you mean."

"I thought——"

"So did I," said Marty. "Let it go at that," and he sat down and slept some more, for the three hours in the barn chair had left him hungry for more.

A bailiff touched him on the shoulder presently, and he was summoned into court, sworn, motioned to the torture chair and asked his name, address, occupation, and other irrelevant questions. Then Mr. Fox got subtle.

"Where were you on the night of a week ago Thursday?" he asked.

"On the seat of my cab."

"Have you a record of where you drove at various times that evening?"

"No."

"Has your company?"

"No."

"Have you ever seen this before?" and he held up

the charted roll of paper, which had been subpoenaed duces tecum.

"No."

"Do you know what it is?"

"No."

"Permit me, then, to inform you. The auditor of your company has testified here that this line from this point to that curve indicates that you left the hotel at approximately 9:50 o'clock P. M. of the day in question, drove north about two and one-quarter miles and east about one-third of a mile, stopped, let out a passenger or passengers; the record shows that you carried two passengers and collected \$1.90. Do you remember such a ride, with two passengers, and collecting such a fare?"

Marty glanced up. In a seat at the table he saw the woman he had carried over that ride. In his mind's eye he saw the young professional dancer whom he had carried with her. He knew exactly where he had stopped—at a Frenchy restaurant known for its curtained dining-rooms. He remembered that she had paid him—had given him \$3 and discharged him. She had been veiled. She was veiled now, too. The chart in his mind was clearer than the one in the lawyer's hand—and more detailed.

"We never remember who we carry or where," said he.

"That is not answering my question—do you remember that ride?"

"I never remember anything."

"Let me put it this way—did you ever see this lady before?"

"Not that I remember."

"Would you remember if you had?"

"No."

"You mean to say that if you had seen her—if you had seen her many times, let us say—you would not remember her?"

"Not if I could help it."

"What? How can you help remembering people?"

"By forgetting them."

"Are you having sport with me?"

"No."

"Would you remember me if you saw me again?"

"Maybe—if I saw you good."

"Did you ever drive me in your taxicab?"

"I don't know. Did I? Do you remember me?"

The court said, "Here, here."

"Did the manager or any other official or employee

of your company instruct you to block this inquiry or refuse to give information?"

"No. The manager of the company told me to be guided by my conscience. '

"By that alone?"

"That's all he mentioned. But I suppose if I want to use my head it's all right with him, too."

"Use your head to what purpose?"

"To think—to—remember."

"Well, then, combining your conscience and your head in an effort to remember, do you remember such a ride as I have described or do you remember this lady here?"

"I never remember anything."

"Your honor," cried the lawyer, addressing the court, "this witness is insolent and it is my opinion that his tactics are grossly contemptuous of this court, not to say insulting to counsel and a flagrant effort at defeating the ends of justice. I ask that the witness be reprovved or fined for contempt."

"The court," said his honor, "will guard its dignity and will take action if contempt appears. Proceed with the examination "

"Is it not a fact," bellowed the lawyer, "that on the night of a week ago Thursday you drove this woman

and a man from the hotel where you are stationed to——”

“Object—leading question,” interjected the woman’s attorney.

“Sustained,” said the court.

The irritated lawyer bit his pencil, bit his lips, tried again.

“Did you ever hear of Cal or Calvin Shrewsbury, a professional dancer?”

“Sure,” said Marty. “He dances at the hotel.”

“Ah—and if you had driven him—this dancer whom you admit you know—would you remember that?”

“I didn’t admit I knew him. I said I heard of him.”

“Well, do you know him?”

“Not that I can remember.”

“Is he blond, dark, tall, short—what does he look like?”

“I didn’t say I ever saw him. Why do you ask me what he looks like?”

“Did you ever see him?”

“I suppose so. I don’t remember.”

“Is that he?” pointing to the woman’s husband.

“I don’t know.”

"If that were he and you had ever driven him, would you remember?"

"If I didn't forget."

"Did you ever drive him—this man?" again pointing to the husband.

The husband leaped up, flushed, raised his arm as though to intervene, but his lawyer pushed him back in his chair.

"Yes," said Marty.

"Ah, you remember this gentleman. If you remember him how is it you cannot remember any one else? If you cannot remember any one else, how can you remember him?"

"I remember him," said Marty, "because, out of thousands of men I've drove, he was the only one what ever told me to forget I drove him. That's why I remember him. He's the only one what ever told me that. He's the only one what I remember."

"That's all," said the lawyer.

The woman's lawyer arose.

"Where did you drive this man on the occasion that he asked you to forget?"

"North two and a quarter miles, east a third of a mile from the hotel."

"That's all," said the woman's lawyer.

At 7 o'clock that evening a woman, veiled, walked to the side of Marty's cab.

"Here," she said, trying to press a wad of bills in his hand.

"Beg pardon, lady—but what's the idea?" asked Marty.

"You were very—very kind—this morning—in court," said she. "I—I was in your hands. I shall never forget you."

"I don't remember you," said Marty.

The woman commanded him to open the door of his car. She entered.

"Drive half a block north and stop," said she.

Marty cranked up, drove, and stopped.

"How much?" said the lady.

"Thirty cents."

"Here," she said. "The \$99.70 is a tip."

"Thanks," said Marty. "If you ever need a driver just call for Taylor—Marty Taylor."

"I will," said she. "And will you remember me now?"

"No," said Marty. "But Mrs. Taylor will. She don't drive a taxi."



IX

THE CANADA KID

- I. WHAT'S ENVIRONMENT?**
- II. FINDS A QUEER OASIS**
- III. LOOKS NINETY DAYS IN THE FACE**
- IV. A CRAFTY COMRADE**
- V. ONLY ONE TO A CUSTOMER**
- VI. LOSES HIS JEWEL**



IX
THE CANADA KID

I
WHAT'S ENVIRONMENT?

JUST about the way the Canada Kid told it to me I tell it to you.

"I see where youse newspaper guys an' a lotta baldheaded parties wit' whiskers an' a lotta judges is tryin' to copper the lowdown on the bad boy problem. It ain' no problem. They's only two gags to it—what youse tallheads calls heredity an' environment. Now which is it? It's both. I'll show you.

"They was two young cons sittin' nex' to each other in Joliet, twistin' rattan into chairs. One of 'em was me; the other was Chiggers Boyd. We was both good lads, but we was both bad boys. One of us was heredity; one of us was environment; both of us was doin' time.

"Chiggers an' me was born nex' door to each other. It wasn' no boulevard where we come. They's a

big offus buildin' there now, an' it sells by the front foot; oncet it was two shanties, an' it smelled by the backyard.

"Chiggers' old man was a teamster an' his old lady was a washwoman. They never saw a crooked nickel unless you call beatin' a horse for two dollars a day taking a shade. My old man was a yegg, an' my old lady was a crook.

"My old man was killed blowin' a safe when I was a baby. My mother stole to feed me. I stole the firs' dime I ever had an' every other dime I ever had ever since. I stole a bass drum once.

"The firs' good stealin' I ever done was when I was sellin' papers. I useta wait till somebody gimme a quarter or a half an' I'd give him the rush an' say 'Jus' a minute—bring yer change right back.' That there was years ago, but I bet some o' them guys is waitin' yet for their change. F'm that I begun pickin' pockets in a small way. Firs' I jackrolled a couple o' drunks, then I spreads out a little an' goes after live ones.

"The firs' good job I gets away wit' is right in broad daylight in front of a swell hotel. I takes a rum wit' a plug hat an' a frock coat what's walkin' wit' a umbrella in his duke an' a cigar in his face, so

busy thinkin' what a wonder he is that he ain't got no time to remember what he's got in the tail pocket of his tailor-made coat. I strip him for a leather poke an' duck in an alley an' look inside. It's got eighty bucks in it. Say—the sight o' that much dough scared me. I trun away the poke an' I goes home an' I slips six o' them ten-case notes to other lads—one of 'em went to Chiggers, who was my pal.

“Chiggers an' me goes on a ice-cream jag an' a cigarette festival. It takes us two weeks to spend that kale. By that time he had a touch o' high life an' he wanted more. I told him where an' how I made the touch. It looked pretty easy to him.

“Well, the firs' thing I know, Chiggers is out on his own an' pretty soon he comes in wit' four dollars. An' so it goes on.

“I was pretty near thirteen before I takes my firs' flop. A plain-clothes dick nails me wit' my fingers in a rube's overcoat an' in I goes. There wasn' no Juv'nile Court then, so nex' mornin' I looks a judge in the face. The judge he knows my old lady as good as I do, an' he says somethin' about what else could he expec' from Mollie's boy, an' he jolts me the limit—down to the school.

“Well, I'm in there about t'ree weeks, learnin'

how to write an' how to smoke hop an' how to spell an' how to make the dice roll sevens, when a new lad is brung in, an' who could it be but my ol' sidekicker an' childhood neighbor, Chiggers. He tells me he was pinched in a crowd wit' the goods. His parents was in court an' they hollered an' promised an' everything. But the cops says he was a pal o' mine—a pal o' the notorious son o' the notorious safebuster an' the notorious shoplifter, an' the judge says somethin' about what could he expect' from a neighbor o' mine, and Chiggers is sent down to complete his education.

"We graduates wit' full honors when we're sixteen. The bulls is waitin' for us. My old lady croaks while I'm away, so they ain' nothin' to keep me aroun' home. I blows for Canada—that's where my monicker come from.

"Outta nine years wit' the Allies I does about four in the iron trenches at Moose Jaw for gran' larceny. In Canada they're even harder on secon' an t'ird timers than here, so I beats it back. I gets away wit' the work for a while an' then Kelly and Kiernan jobs me an' I go down for a ten-spot, outta which I done six honest years in the big house.

"About the fourt' man to greet me in stir was Chiggers. After he was sprung outta the school his

old man gets him a job—drivin' a team an' liftin' barrels. Chiggers knew how he could make more in a day than they pay for that in a year an' keep his mitts clean besides. So he lef' the team in a alley an' went back to somethin' he knew somethin' about. He was doin' one to five years when I runs acrost him this time.

"He was out an' back again before I was paroled on good behavior. While he was out his mother died an' he told me it was a swell blowoff, wit' a church an' weepin' neighbors an' everything, which was all different from my old lady's finish, which come in the bridewell from the D. T.'s.

"An' I gets to thinkin'.

"Here's me what couldn't turn out no other way becus I was the son of a tough box-cracker an' a whisky-drinkin' counter-snatcher. How could I turn out a preacher or a business guy, huh? I was a thief before I was born.

"But here was Chiggers. He was the only child of a sweaty swill-driver what was so square he wouldn't take home kindlin' wood off the city dump, an' a hard-washin', fat lady what'd do a lace petticoat over again if it had a dust spot on it.

"What right had Chiggers to land in the same

pen wit' me? Chiggers had went to church an' to school a little, an' he was always kep' in Sundays an' he had to be home nights an' everything. Now, where did all that get him anything? He wasn' even a better rattan bender than what I was, an' the only learnin' I ever had was how to tell a cop by lookin' at his feet, which my dear old mother had showed me when I was playin' at her knee.

"Yes—what was he doin' in the same stir wit' me? If it was heredity what makes boys so sideways, here I was to prove it. But they wasn' none in Chiggers. It must be the other—environment.

"Well, what was Chiggers' environment? Me—I was his environment. Get it?"

II

FINDS A QUEER OASIS

The Canada Kid, our nimble-fingered young friend, had just returned from a voyage of reprisal among the Reubens, toiling here and there where a Chautauqua, a merchants' convention, or a Chaplin film brought gatherings of the rural yeomanry.

He had brought back a little sugar and, breathing the dirty air of his native metropolis again, was glad to be home—glad to be home, bo.

The kid was no child. He loved all the fifty-two cards in the pack when they sat in proper sequence or juxtaposition; he craved his smooth liquor; he loved to blink back at many candle power, incandescent and iridescent, and he rejoiced that he was again among the avenues of modernity, luxury, and ribaldry, where he could get a steak that answered to the edge of steel, and where he could get lump sugar for his coffee.

So he leaned his elbow upon the cigar case of the all-night levee drug-store and blew cigarette smoke through his nostrils as he passed the time of night with the owl clerk.

"I runs into a hot sketch down in one o' them dry burls," said the Kid. "I'm dyin' for a shot o' booze—dyin'. I snoops around becuz I knows they ain' no place where the sun shines what a guy can't get a drink if he only knows how an' where. But I can't make no pig—I can't turn up no sandy.

"I'm standin' there on a corner an' along comes a guy I bet he was eighty. He had white whiskers from his ears to his shins. I says to myself that here's a old settler. If anybody knows anything that was the gink. So I wigwags him, he stops an' I braces him.

“‘Stranger,’ says I, ‘I’m gonna ask you a question an’ you think deep an’ answer careful, becus a life depends on it. Is they in this here queer tank a joint, a dive, or a hospital where a guy can get a little swallow o’ booze, whiskey, alcohol, rum, or fusel-oil?’

“He looks right past me, he does, an’ he says off in the air: ‘I don’ know. But you turn aroun’ that corner and walk in the second house to your right. Don’ ring no bell or knock—nobody won’t answer. Jus’ walk in—the doors is open. When you gets inside open the secon’ door on the left an’ walk in the room. Then you’ll know what to do.’

“‘Will I get a drink there?’ says I. ‘I don’ know nothin’ about that,’ says the party wit’ the white muff. ‘Jus’ do as I told you an’ you’ll know what to do,’ an’ he hobbles off.

“Well, I says to myself, the old buck is cracked, but what harm could it do to take a chance? So I beats aroun’ the corner, picks out the second house to my right, tries the door and it opens; I walks in, nobody stops me. I goes to the second door on my left and tries that; it’s open, too. I steps into a room. I takes one look an’ I tumbles to the lay.

“What do you think was in that there room? On

one wall is a sideboard, an' standin' on the sideboard is a bottle of every kind o' rye, Scotch, an' bourbon what you could name. In a corner is a tub o' ice an' in it is floatin' half a dozen bottles o' seltzer. On a table stands a lot o' glasses. In a chiny bowl is a lot o' hunks o' cracked ice. In a saucer is a lot o' cut lemon peels.

"And—on a little stand in the middle o' the room stands a little tin quarter savin's bank."

"Queer layout," said the clerk.

"Get jerry," said the Canada Kid. "I sees the wrinkle in a flash. It's a crime in that village to peddle booze. But if a guy wants to trespass on private prop'ty, walk into another man's house without no invite an' nobody seein' him, an' he wants to steal the other party's booze an' ice an' lemon peel what's standin' in his private room—if that party wants to take a chance like that an' cops off a drink, an' if he wants to do what he can to make up for it by drop-pin' a quarter in that little savin's bank, why say! Get me?"

"Some scheme," said the clerk.

"Best I ever see," said the Kid. "I picks up the bank an' rattles it. It's one o' them what don't open till it's full, when it's got \$20 in quarters. It

was pretty near full. The help-yourself room must 'a' been gettin' a great play.

"So I picks me my bottle o' my favorite rye, I pours four fingers, I takes a highball glass, I fishes up a bottle o' sizz, I drops a dice o' ice in my tumbler, I squeezes in the blood of a slice o' lemon peel, I fills 'er up an' I drinks a toast to the guy what was clever enough to think up a game like that all by himself in a Reub one-night stand. I drinks my drink an' I drops a two-bit piece in the little tin bank.

"Then I fixes me another drink, sloughs that down, an' drops another two-bit piece in the bank. An' then I ducks, a wiser an' a stronger man. An' nobody seen me come in and nobody sees me go out."

"It's a wild story," said the clerk. "And it's a good story. The only thing the matter with it is that I don't believe a word of it."

"You don't?" said the Canada Kid, hurt at the blunt aspersion on his veracity.

"No—I don't," said the clerk.

"You don't?" said the Kid, digging into his pocket and bringing up his hand with a bright and shining object in it. "Well, if you don't believe it—here's the little tin bank."

III

LOOKS NINETY DAYS IN THE FACE

The Canada Kid was in trouble. Two stupid policemen had taken him in a week-end dragnet, together with hundreds of others whom they found on "the corners." The others were miscellaneous mongrels of the underworld with no particular breed or brand. But the Canada Kid was a "dip" of parts and of class. And he felt ashamed of the company he was in.

So he let forth a squawk for help and his friend, the Reporter, answered it.

"They're gonna vag me sure," said the Kid. "This here captain is out for to make a record and he don't care who suffers. It's a dirty shame after I done swell lifts for years and bulled the swellest bulls outta the Chief's office, to get picked up by a flatfoot in harness—and fer nuthin'—fer nuthin'."

"Is there anything on you?" asked the Reporter.

"Clean as a sucker," said the Kid. "I haven't turned a trick for a week. I got dough in the kick, so I ain't no vag. But that captain'll hang it on me. This here round-up thing is gettin' to be a pest. They takes the sheeps wit' the wolfs and they ain't got no respec' fer nobody. What do I do?"

The Reporter said he knew the Judge and that was the party it would be up to. So he promised to appear as a character witness for his friend the Kid and see what could be done.

A police court is not an orderly place at morning session. The prisoners, lawyers, policemen, and slummers mingle in a thick stew of coming and going, pushing and crowding, gossiping and cursing, with the Judge's flat bench the centre of the ebb and flow.

Gathered in a solid semicircle about the seat of justice was as fine a crew of porch-climbers, safe-crackers, crapshooters, and just plain bums as ever had fallen soothingly upon the eye of the Reporter. One by one they were called, got quick action, and went downstairs to take the ride to the bridewell. It was a hard day for the masses. The old Judge rained alike upon the just and the unjust, and his system was full of ninety days.

The Canada Kid was called. He had a lawyer who had been paid in advance. The Captain pushed his way forward for that case and the Reporter crammed up to the front, likewise.

"This bird, your honor," said the Captain, "is the Canada Kid. He is a notorious pickpocket. He doesn't live in this district. We took him min-

gling with the crowd. I want you to make an example of this case."

"My client——" began the Kid's lawyer, but the Captain gave him a black look and the Judge silenced him.

"Just a minute, Judge," said the Reporter. "I came here to testify to the defendant's character. It is true that he has been in trouble, but I happen to have seen him every night for several weeks and I know from what I know that he has been behaving and is trying to be decent—and he will be if he is let alone."

The Judge looked to the Captain; the Captain smiled, then said:

"What's the use, your honor, bringing in this kind of rats when men who ought to know better come here to cheat us out of 'em? Now, there's no use kidding ourselves, your honor. The Kid is a dip—he'd steal the stars out of the flag, he would. We've been layin' for him a long time. Now we got him. Are you gonna let him get away with it?"

"You say," said the Judge to the Reporter, "that you know of your own knowledge that this defendant has been trying to live an honest life?"

"I do," said the Reporter, without a blush. "The

police are especially sore at him because he tipped me to some inside stuff."

"On the strength of your statement," said the Judge, "I must find the defendant not guilty—Callanexcase."

The Captain threw up his hands and shook his head. The Reporter smiled, for victory always is sweet, and he and the Canada Kid worked their way out of the crowd into the open area of the room.

The Kid had a sob in his throat. He started to say something and couldn't. Then he just stuck out his right paw and the Reporter took it. And the Canada Kid found his voice.

"You're a pal," he said. "If it wasn't fer you I'd been downstairs by now wit' the rest o' the cattle and a lot o' fawraners an' cheap panhandlers and nickel snatchers. Say—I had ninety days in the bandhouse makin' eyes at me. You never done ninety out there. It ain't nice, take it from the Kid.

"My wife is waitin' home fer me. And say—she'll be glad to see me. And when she sees you—well, our flat is yourn, and you can break the two of us. Is that good enough?"

"Oh, that's all right," said the Reporter. "Glad to do it for you."

"You're an ace. Say, I guess that there Judge don't think nothin' of you, huh? Say—you could spring Jesse James, you could."

"The Judge knows I wouldn't testify to anything but the truth," said the Reporter.

"It's all right—I'm laughin'," said the Kid. "But I don't guess they was a guy in the town could 'a' beat that for me excep' you. Did you make that lawyer? He got a long ways, he did. He stands good in this here court, he does—like a rent collector or somethin'. No, sir—I owe it to you, old scout. I'd 'a' been on my merry way to that there municipal bastile by now if it wasn't fer you. And maybe you don't think I know it? You done me a turn, you did. But I was there fer you, too."

"For me?" asked the Reporter.

"You bet," said the Canada Kid. "Here's your watch and your poke and your tiepin and your keys," and he handed his dumbfounded friend his things out of many pockets.

"Why——"

"'Tsallright," said the Kid. "I boosts 'em while you was tellin' how square I was."

"Right in court—with coppers all around you—you're crazy," said the Reporter.

"Think I am? Did you see what was standin' alongside o' you? Flip Ballinger, that there California crook what would 'a' cleaned you if I hadn' beat him to it. They was too many dips there to suit me. It was no safe place for square guys like you and me."

IV

HAILS CRAFTY COMRADE

The Canada Kid stood wistfully at the corner where the shopping crowds were eddying back and forth, blew on his cold fingers, and sucked at a hand-rolled cigarette that was out and rapidly being blown apart.

In years gone by he had always picked up a considerable collection of Christmas change in the fortnight before the holiday. He was not in favor of early shopping. He was for concentrating it all into, let us say, the three weeks just before the big day. He was for congestion and confusion. In that atmosphere he worked most profitably.

The Kid's treasure was in other people's pockets. It had to be approached with discretion and removed with tact because other people are so fussy about such things. Women, especially, were his fortune at times

like this. Women have no pockets to speak of, but they have pocketbooks.

Years ago, when women carried long, loose bags, flapping from strings at their wrists, shopping crowds were worth something. But now most of them held little Saratoga trunks with stiff and unyielding sides, attached to little leather straps held tightly clutched between finger and thumb. And attempting to blow one of those young safes in the grip of a shopper, no matter how concentrated she might be in her mission, was about as easy as touching an exposed nerve without notifying the patient.

Furthermore, the Christmas buyers were assaying less and less each year because they no longer carried large rolls of bills, as Christmas buyers should at a time when Yule supplies are in season. The department stores had gradually forged along and popularized an insidious system of charge accounts, so that a prosperous woman could go forth and break her husband with no more cash than enough for car fare and a sundae.

All this made the Canada Kid feel peevish, pessimistic, and hurt. He was entitled to a Christmas, too. And, from the outlook, it would be pretty lean. His holiday trade was ruined and the scant pickings on

street cars and in theatre crowds was scarcely worth talking about. The police had him pretty thoroughly marked and he couldn't work the soft spots in the open where the loot was good as he could at one time. "Merry Christmas" sounded in the offing like a myth.

As he stood there he saw, slimly wending his way through the curling crowd, Hugo the Wop, one of the most successful and least ethical of his profession. Hugo bore a charmed liberty and seemingly always worked and never got into trouble, which made him unpopular with the craft. For one thing, he seldom took a chance, being satisfied to walk and walk and watch and watch and spring only when it looked safe, no matter how small the prospects. By sheer patience and industry, Hugo managed to steal a pretty fair living.

But he was no artist. He took no pride in his work. He stole as though stealing were a trade rather than a profession. Nothing was too small for him to hook his fingers around. He threw nothing back into the water in his game of fishing for coin.

The Canada Kid stepped out into the middle of the walk and took hold of Hugo's arm. The sallow

little rascal's body pulled up rigid, with a tremor that ceased when it had passed from below, above and through. Hugo turned his head slowly and fear-somely. He saw the Kid. At first a look of supreme relief crossed his features, succeeded by an expression of anger.

"Fo' what you grabba me?" demanded Hugo.

"C'me 'ere," said the Kid, seeking to draw him to the inner edge of the walk.

"Wha' you want?" asked Hugo testily. "I gotta no time."

"No—I suppose you're on de way to see your sick gran'mudder or sumtin'," said the Kid.

"I gotta my work to do," said Hugo.

"C'me 'ere," said the Kid, tightening his hold and all but dragging Hugo toward the wall of the store nearby.

Hugo, finding resistance unprofitable because of his physical disadvantages, and unattractive because of his natural carefulness and disinclination for trouble, sidled along and faced the Kid.

"Well," said he. "Now what you want?"

"It's been pretty cheesy fer me," began the Kid.

"Not a cent," said Hugo. "You can go out maka mon just lika me."

"I jus' wants about a twenny," said the Kid. "I'll kick it back soon. You know me, Wop, I can't go 'long very long widdout puttin' over a grand haul, see? Jus' twenny——"

"No," said Hugo. "I never len'."

"Ain't you got no dough?" asked the Kid.

"Sure," said Hugo. "I gotta a hundre' an' ninety dollar in my innaside vest pocka. But he's a mine, notta yourn. I never len'."

"Well, say—you know I ain't de kind what goes aroun' makin' cheap touches offa penny-swipers like you. But I tell you I gotta have a twenny. It's been tough—rotten. I'm a bum, see."

"I no care whatta you gotta," said Hugo. "I gotta my dough; you go getta yourn," and, though the Kid seized him by the vest and clung on for half a minute, Hugo wrenched himself loose and, with frightened but aggrieved and injured look, worked his way back into the crowd again and took up his business of seeking with shifty eye here and there and there and beyond for an unguarded handbag or a promising trousers pocket.

"Well, whaddaye know about dat dere stingy Guinea, huh?" the Kid asked of the Kid. "Hikes aroun' wit' a hundre' an' ninety bucks in 'is kick an'

won't loosen a double X fer an ol' frien' what's up again' it? Why, dat guy ain't got de firs' idee about bein' square wit' a pal or librul wit' an ol' friend in de same line. An'——"

And the Kid turned toward the wall, and, holding his two hands down where his action would not attract attention, he ran his thumb over a little bundle of bank-notes.

"An'—besides, he's a liar. Dere ain' no hundred an' ninety bucks here at all. Dere's only a hundred an' eighty-two."

V

ONLY ONE TO A CUSTOMER

The Canada Kid strolled down the crowded street where humanity bumped and fought to express its buoyant Christmastide spirit. All platitudinous blather about doing shopping early was past. It was now or never. The throb of charity may have been in the hearts of the throng, but hurry and grim determination was stamped on its features. It was no place for little men or weak women. The fittest were the ones who arrived.

Like New Year's eve to the waiter or Fourth of July to the firecracker packer, the day before Christ-

mas, when millions shop in space meant for thousands, was the day the argosy came home for the Canada Kid and his fellow professionals in the refined and nifty art of extracting from the pockets of the preoccupied the means for the necessities of life.

The Kid elbowed, looked two ways at once, and worked like a beaver. The crowds sweeping out through the revolving door of a big shopping emporium carried him almost to the edge of the sidewalk and almost off his balance.

"The little reading lamp—the little electric reading lamp—twenty-five cents and no home complete without one," sang a voice.

The Kid puckered up his forehead. He had heard that mellifluous voice before—somewhere. It carried an echo of a past—a past of long ago. The Kid turned and squirmed, and he saw a man with an armful of little brass contrivances, wound with shiny green snaky cords.

"The little reading lamp——"

The Kid "got" him. "Silk" Tavannes, in his day the smoothest green goods steerer, the oiliest master of the tip and toss the West had known, who had worked them all, from the Spanish letter to the inside

tip from Sheepshead Bay. And there he was, a sidewalk curbstone faker, peddling with droning voice two-bit swindles to the Christmas crowds.

The Canada Kid was busy. But he had to stop. He breasted his way to where Tavannes stood.

"The little reading lamp——" and "Silk" looked up. "Well, I'll be——"

"So you've fell to this?" said the Canada Kid. "I didn't think you had it in you."

A woman stopped, examined one of the corded things, asked a question, and took one. "Silk" short-changed her for a dollar and she went on her way rejoicing.

"Shovin' two-bit queers—'Silk' Tavannes, the silk-lined terror o' the rural boob," said the Kid, shaking his head mournfully.

Just then a householder with his arms heaped to the nose with polyglot and undovetailing parcels stopped, asked solicitously how the things worked, and bought two for half a dollar.

"Thank you," said "Silk."

"An' you thank 'em yet," said the Canada Kid. "'Silk' Tavannes passin' out neatly wrapped packages for a quarter in a crowd an' thankin' suckers, yet."

"You see, lady," said Tavannes, "this plug here attaches to any electric connection and by means of this wire, which is unusually long, the lamp can be adjusted to throw its rays anywhere within the radius of the ordinary room. These little lamps are sold at a loss, merely for the advertising and to increase the business of the electric light corporations, which are behind the movement to sell these little lamps at this time in this manner, so that——"

"I'll take three," said the woman, handing him a \$2 bill.

"A one," said 'Silk,' handing her 25 cents. Thank you."

"Merry Christmas to you and yours," said the woman, and she sped on.

"Does the blame things work—can you light 'em?" asked the Kid.

"Don't make me laugh," said "Silk." "What do you want for a quarter? The cord on them is worth that much, even if there ain't no wire in it."

"I t'ought so," said the Kid. "Crooked to the finish. An' at twenny-five a t'row. Pretty small business, 'Silk.' Takin' suckers wit' their hearts full o' Christmas, breakin' their neck to buy somet'in' for somebody, wit' no suspicion in their soul—you

what used to trim smart-Alec get-rich-quick guys an' take the dicks what come after you. You've flopped a long way, 'Silk.' A long way."

"Yes, sir," said Tavannes. "They serve the double purpose of reading and bedroom lamps. You will notice the length of the cord, the insulation of indestructible wire, by means of which with ordinary care the little lamp will last a lifetime and prove both an ornament and an indispensable household article——"

"One," said the man, and he took it and ran.

"Now that guy," said the Canada Kid, "he'll take that there bum dummy lamp home an' give it to his wife an' she'll kiss him an' call him Daddy an' wish him a merry Christmas an' then they'll start to light it an' he'll be a rummy in his own home on the bigges' night in the year what a guy is got—square or crooked—an' you gits whatever your cut-in is on his two bits. It looks to me like peanut business for a guy like you what amounted to somethin' once an' might yet get by if you went out after the big work, wit' your talents an' your front an' your line o' language—say——"

"Yes, madame. We are not supposed to sell more than one to a customer, but you look something

like my dear old mother, and since you ask me so hard, I'll let you have three," said "Silk."

"She bought somethin'," said the Kid. "Hookin' women an' kids, huh? Well, so long, 'Silk.' I t'ought better of you. Merry Christmas to you just the same. I gotta be goin'."

"Merry Christmas, Kid," said "Silk." "Say—just a moment. I've been pretty busy, so I ain't had much time to talk back to you. But I want to tell you something. You're right—in a way. I'm standing here taking quarters away from the public at large, skinning them and much obliged to do it. They're out buying presents for their wives and their husbands and their kids. It's a shame to do it, I know. And I'm ashamed to be grafting for chicken-feed, myself."

"Then why——"

"I've got four kids of my own," said "Silk."
"Yes, ma'am, the little electric reading lamp—guaranteed to——"

VI

THE CANADA KID LOSES HIS JEWEL

Here is the Canada Kid's lament:

"You remember Jewel? Sure you do—my wife.

Well, you ain't seen her much around lately, have you? No—nor me, neither.

"Gone with a fumble-fingered dip what couldn't stick his arm in a empty barrel without turnin' in a riot call—that clumsy gun what they call Larry Larkin. Every time he lifts a poke the whole machinery of the law begins to move. She'll do well with that web-footed boy.

"But she's there—she's there. I learned her everything she knows, but now she's the smoothest booster that ever went into a store with a blind pocket and come out with a diamond necklace. And all I did for that woman. When I meets her first she don't know nothin'. I heps her to the work. Her idea of gettin' by was to steal washin' off the line. When I last see her she's rollin' in sparklers and she's got a bank roll.

"And then, just to make her feel better, I marries her. Sure—license and everything. And say—the way I treats that woman nobody believed we was married. That's the way I treats here.

"The first night we're married I takes her to a swell joint for chicken stew and a bottle o' wine. She's heard I'm pretty nifty, but you know how a guy is when he's stuck. Well, she sees a pearl dog-collar

on a society woman's neck and she goes crazy over it. To cut it short, before we blows the place she's got it.

"And now what does she do? When I'm out workin', trying to cop a dollar on the rattlers and takin' chances, she's home loafin'. When a woman ain't got nothin' to keep her hands movin', that's when she gets into mischief. That's when Jewel meets this Larkin, a jailbird what a decent gun wouldn't trade cigarettes with. And I comes home and she's gone.

"I'm through. I don' wanna never see her again. She took me good and she left me flat, and no matter how bad a guy feels there's a time when he's gotta wake up an' take a flop to himself. If she'd 'a' done it in a moment's foolishness I could 'a' forgive her. But I see she had this framed, greased, and laid out for days. So it's cold.

"It's got me wingin', too. I keep right on workin'—I lift a boob for \$106.60 on a mainstem caboose yesterday. But what's the use? Who am I workin' for? What's the use o' gettin' dough if you ain't got a woman to give it to? Oh, yes, I keeps right on takin' suckers with their pockets smilin' to me, but I tell you this—my heart ain't in my work."

The Reporter told the Canada Kid he was sorry. Who wouldn't have been? Because a man picks pockets is no sign he hasn't a heart. And the Canada Kid had always had one, and a big one, too.

The Reporter had seen the romance of the Canada Kid and Jewel Slater, as pretty a girl as ever robbed a store or lied to a judge. He had seen their happiness. They were interested in each other's work and each had spurred the other on to greater deeds. It was an ideal union. The Kid stole for Jewel and Jewel stole for the Kid. It was touching—any way you take it—and they took it both ways.

Then came Larry, who was all the Kid had called him—a professional pickpocket with the soft approach of a motor truck, who was out of jail only long enough to steal himself right back in again. He had no art, he had no finesse, he had no beauty, and the Kid had all these. And yet the Reporter had seen a growing attachment between Jewel and Larry and now had heard the pathetic climax it developed.

Some months went by. The Reporter was drawing ellipses with a thick, blunt pencil point on a pad of police paper in the reporter's dock at the trial court. He looked up from the monotony of the

cases that had gone on—name, charge, facts, alibi, thirty days—at the sound of a familiar name. And he looked up to see the pale face of Larry Larkin, alone, frowsy, and surrounded by husky detectives.

The testimony was incontrovertible. Larkin had been caught in *flagrante delictu* with his plowboy hand in the pocket of a butcher. They flashed his record and dragged him away, with a year in the bridewell smiling a welcome to its prodigal.

Two days later the Reporter met Jewel. She had been crying.

“Have you seen the Kid?” she asked.

“Some time ago,” said the Reporter.

“Do you know where I can find him?” asked Jewel.

“I can find him,” said the Reporter.

Jewel wrote down an address and a telephone number on a scrap of an envelope. She handed it to him, looked up into his face, and turned and walked away.

The Reporter found the Canada Kid playing stuss behind a cigar store. He called him aside.

“Jewel’s back,” said the Reporter.

“What’s that to me?” blazed the Kid. “I told you where she got off with me,” and he turned back toward the table.

"That's her address and her 'phone number," he said. "She was crying when I left her."

A week later the Reporter strolled through the central highway of underworld commerce, where were strung tragedies, comedies, and romances of the out-cast, like beads of many colors, shapes, and values upon a thread of black.

Coming toward him, arm in arm, sauntered the Canada Kid and Jewel, his wife. Jewel was fragrant of Hubigant and iridescent with plume and wardrobe. On her right hand flashed a jewellery store. On her left was a lone bit of gold—her wedding ring.

They were engrossed in each other. Jewel chanced to look up and saw the Reporter. She nudged the Kid lovingly and gently and he left her a moment and drew the Reporter aside and wrung his hand.

"She's only a kid," said the Kid. "And kids will play."

"Everything aces now?" asked the Reporter.

"Say," said the Canada Kid, and he reached down and opened at his watch chain a heavy golden locket that he had stolen from a business man

"You see this?" asked the Kid, and the Reporter looked and saw therein a lock of hair of just the color and texture of the fluffy blond hair of Jewel.

The reporter inquiringly leaned his head toward Jewel and the Kid leaned his head down to say "yes."

"You see that there?" asked the Canada Kid, pointing to the little curl of Jewel's hair. "Well, lemme tell you something you may never 'a' got wise to. One o' them there hairs—any one o' them there hairs—is stronger than the Atlantic cable."



X

SECOND FROM THE END





X

SECOND FROM THE END

HEY, you—you!” shouted the director, motioning with his left. No response.
“You—the big one—second from that end!”

She pulled herself together with a bang. Her eyes slowly turned downward in the direction of the pit, where the shirt-sleeved chorus director stood at the night rehearsal of the “Rialto Girl.”

“Welcome to Broadway, cutey,” said he.
“Where’ve you been?”

The showgirl looked about her as though coming out of the enchantment of a far-away dream.

“I—I was—I’m all right now,” she said, opening and shutting and opening her eyes swiftly many times to make sure.

The director took a step forward in the dark house and rested his foot on the brass chain that keeps the bass fiddler from eating little children at matinees.

"You was sleeping!" he shouted. "Where'd you get that stuff? You know what it costs to open up this theatre and hold a rehearsal at night? Huh?"

The showgirl bit her lip. But she answered nothing.

"Well, with these lights and them union stage hands drawing wages that'd break K. & E., and this bush-league orchestra drawing double for overtime and my little so much a day, this here rehearsal costs about twenty-seven dollars a hour. Are you used to sleeping in places what costs twenty-seven dollars a hour? Huh?"

"Yes, sir," said the showgirl.

The director took his foot off the chain.

"Are you trying to make a simp o' me in front o' this company?" he yelled.

"No, sir," said the showgirl.

"All right, then—let's go," said the director.

He turned to the leader, who stood with bow up-raised.

"Shoot," said the director.

The showgirls, including the second from that end, straightened up and started a stately number, diagonal from down-stage left toward upper centre, and stopped on music-cue.

"Picture!" cried the director.

And they leaned upon their parasols and smiled. For they were Palm Beach belles at the seaside.

In the director's breast still burned the "Yes, sir. No, sir," from the second from that end. He looked at the formation and the individual posings. He shoved a whistle between his teeth and blew. The music stopped mid-bar. The girls looked out to him, each fearful, each certain that hers had been the blunder.

"You!" said the director. "You—Miss Sleeping Beauty. Did you ever see a society woman in Palm Beach lean on her parasol like that?"

"Yes, sir," said the showgirl.

The director threw up his hands.

"Well, of all the fresh Janes since Eva Tanguay run a hatpin in Lew Fields's ankle, you're a star with me!" he bellowed. "First, you paid twenty-seven dollars a hour for a bedroom; now you know more than what I do about how a Palm Beach millionaire works with a parasol. Say, Ethel Barrymore—what's your name?"

"Gloria Gale," said the second from that end.

"No!" gasped the director.

"Yes, sir," said the showgirl.

"Well, well!" said he, and for a moment he threw his eyes toward the proscenium in apparent reverie. "Well—what do you think o' that?" Then he straightened himself, threw back his shoulders, and called: "All right, the way you hold that parasol is O. K. You girls watch the way Miss Gale holds that parasol. Get it? All right—let's go."

And they went.

Far into the night they went. Four numbers passed through rehearsal. The director blew his whistle.

"Fine business," said he. "Ten-thirty in the morning. And get up on them new lyrics for tomorrow. Let down your drop, Bill. G'night."

The director put on his coat and hurried through the front. He turned toward the passage that led from the stage entrance, stopped, lit a cigarette, tilted his little derby hat toward his right eye, leaned his back against the wall, crossed his feet and waited.

Not unprepossessing was the chorus director. He was one of the few in his industry that had bucked through the borders of a union card. He had begun his career as a stage hand, moving scenery. Now he staged dances, and invented new rhythmic foolishness for choruses, and was admitted a successful director, a severe taskmaster, and a natural dis-

ciplinarian. He spoke sharply to his girls, but the critics spoke sweetly of them.

His income now might have been ten thousand dollars a year. His necktie cost a dollar, and his clothes fit him as though they were made for him. But his hair was saucered on the back of his neck, which was reddish; and he wore a ring with two and a half carats of diamonds clustered of forty chips.

Many a chorus girl preferred him to some flimsy John, and he had met a few that he might have fancied. But he was a single man. He knew too much about chorus girls. All their secrets were his. He knew some that earned their thirty dollars a week and were always overdrawn, a dollar at a time; he knew others that earned less and had better cars than the owner of the show. He knew some—he knew all kinds.

The second from that end came out of the passage. The director uncrossed his feet and lifted his derby hat. She bowed, and was about to go along. But he took her by the arm.

He looked her over, up and down. She was dressed mostly in black—nothing gaudy. Her little toque was simple and tasteful. Her suit lined down her slender figure with scarce a ripple and not a fold.

Her slippers were high of heel and plain of toe. The only jewel that she wore was consistency.

"Where're you living now, Miss Gale?" he asked.

"In a boarding-house, up in Harlem," said she.

"Better let me take you in a taxi," he suggested.

"Thanks," said the showgirl.

He called it. She entered, leaned back, shut her sleepy eyes, and said nothing.

"How's it come, Miss Gale," said the director, "that you're back in the chorus? Where's that alimony—and them stones?"

Without opening her eyes, and, perhaps without breaking her chain of thought at all, she answered:

"He has millions and lawyers, and the alimony is always tied up by some appeal or other in some court or other. The jewels? I have the tickets."

"But you were way up in show-business," said he. "Say, I remember when you first turned out in 'The Toy Hussars.' They used to call you 'the girl with the lavender tights,' and you knocked 'em stiff at the Stuyvesant."

"That was fifteen years ago," said the showgirl. "One can't wear tights forever. And after some things one sometimes loses the taste for them."

"I can see that," said he. "But where's your

pipes? Don't I remember you with the Herald Square Comic Opera Company in 'Satan's Sweet-heart?' You sung 'Love Divine,' then. And, say, you knocked 'em out o' their seats with that soprano and them—the way you looked in tights."

"That was the song that took me out of tights and into mansions," she said. "That was the song I was singing when he first saw me. I was getting along nicely just then; but he fell in love with me, or the song, or the tights—or all of them. Anyway, he wouldn't give me any rest. He had millions. The other girls all told me I was crazy even to hesitate. They all envied me. Nobody knew."

"Well—what happened?" asked the director solicitously.

"He married me," said the showgirl.

"I see," said the director.

For blocks no sound within the taxi. The showgirl dreamed along. The director, coming to a cue in the libretto of his thought, hummed dimly:

*"Oh, love divine, my soul's enchantress,
Oh, love divine, my queen of fairyland,
Could you but know the depth of my devotion,
Could I but kiss——"*

The director turned to the showgirl.

“‘Could I but kiss——’” he hummed. “‘How’s the rest go again?’”

“‘Could I but kiss one finger of your hand,’” she recited, without melody. “‘Silly, isn’t it?’”

“‘Could I but kiss one finger of your hand,’” he hummed. “‘It didn’t sound silly when you sung it fifteen years back. I was shovin’ flats o’ scenery then. I was always settin’ a scene back o’ you while you was singing that. It was the hit o’ the show.’”

“What did you say?” said she.

“The hit o’ the show,” said he. “‘It was one o’ the greatest numbers I ever hear in a musical show.’”

“So he told me,” said the showgirl, in a droning, half-awake voice. “He said it was beautiful. But it wasn’t long before he found other girls whose voices sang beautiful songs to him. He had a wonderful ear for that kind of music. He kept me in luxury. He took me to Newport and Palm Beach and California and to a mansion in Cleveland. It would have been fine if I hadn’t been his wife. That was what started the mischief. If I hadn’t been his wife he could have amused himself with me. But everybody knew we were married—heaven knows the newspapers printed enough about it—so he made the

mistake of introducing me into his kind of society in the first few weeks, when he was still in love. That gave me an appetite for it. My, how I did eat up that drawing-room stuff!

"That's where the big rub came in. He thought he'd kite me around all-night restaurants and go the way he thought was my way. But I wanted to cut that style and go what I thought would be his way. He let me get away with it for a while. He introduced me to his folks. They didn't hit me or throw anything, but that about let them out. They looked at my clothes and almost fainted. I was all wrong. I found that out early, and I switched from my milliner and costumer, who was the most popular outfitter on Longacre Square, but who didn't go so strong on Park Avenue and in those frosty brown-stones in the upper Eightieth streets.

"I tried. Goodness knows, nobody ever tried harder than I did. I watched and I copied, and I thought I was getting along fine and getting away with a lot. But I began to notice things. The other women looked at me as though I was an escaped convict trying to reform, but with the prison brand on me. When they thought I wasn't looking they hunched their shoulders and giggled. At one formal

reception a weatherbeaten old society chromo with enamel on her face that would have had her stopped in the entrance by the stage manager of a burlesque troupe asked me sweetly if I wouldn't sing them a song."

"Well, why didn't you! That's where you had it on 'em all—huh?" said the director.

She turned, looked at him in the dark cab, shook her head.

"You'd be the same hit in society that I was," she said.

"I don't know why you shouldn't have run away with that game," said he. "You've got the looks, you was way up in the profession, you sure got the figger, and you was the wife of a party with all kinds o' dough."

"It isn't what you are," said the showgirl. "It isn't even who you are. It isn't even who you were. It's what you were. You can be the daughter of a millionaire married to a bootblack—you're still in; but the daughter of a bootblack married to a millionaire—out. My husband began to get that straight after a bit. I was afraid of it. He knew it. Then he began to steer me off. But I had that social itch. I guess I began to annoy him. He wasn't the

kind that annoyed very gamely. I insisted that I was his wife, with all the rights that came with that. He asked me to be reasonable. Of all the rotten phrases on earth that's the hardest one to climb over. Every one who doesn't want you to do what you want to do, or wants you to do what you shouldn't do, asks you to be reasonable.

"Well, I wouldn't be reasonable. We had a scene or two. And then he got up and walked out on me. And what he told me before he went was worth hearing. He told me that he had picked me up out of the gutter—mind you, out of the gutter! You know how I was fixed and how I was getting by. I had plenty of fine men crazy over me. And he said he picked me out of the gutter! He said my society notions were absurd—insolent and impossible. I was his wife, and my society notions were absurd.

So he went to his club. I called him up. You know how much satisfaction you can get trying to worm information out of a rich man's club when—no, of course you don't. But I do. I told them I was his wife. The man who answered said he was very sorry, but— Well, so was I sorry. After that I got a weekly check, but he never came

near me again. I heard stories up and down the row about his romancing. Then I met him one day by appointment in his lawyer's office.

"It was the frostiest place I was ever in. Everybody walked on rubber heels in carpets to your ankles, and I was afraid to talk more than in a whisper. He sat at one side of the table, I across from him. His family attorney sat at the end. They told me that if I would agree to a reasonable settlement I would be permitted to get a divorce. I jumped up and I was going to throw an inkwell, but that lawyer looked at me. No wonder those lawyers get a thousand dollars a day. I sat down.

"I said that I had grounds for all kinds of divorces and didn't have to take a reasonable settlement. I wanted a million—cold. The lawyer smiled—pretty cold, too. My husband asked if he might have a word. The lawyer, advising him with his eyes to say nothing, said he could. My husband told me I was silly; that I was from the stage. He said I was ridiculous to expect he'd be—respectable. He didn't expect it of me, he didn't believe I was, and I was foolish if I thought he'd be. He had married me—yes. But it had blown blue. Couldn't I understand and be reasonable? It was quite out of the question

for us to be man and wife again. Now if I would take a thousand dollars a month——”

“That’s a lot o’ dough,” said the director.

“I didn’t want it. I was his wife. I wanted all that that carried with it. That’s why I married him. I didn’t have to marry him to get a thousand dollars a month. I was earning that when he took me off the stage. I was offered that—— Well, never mind. I didn’t want it. I wanted his mother to take me driving and his aunt to invite me to her week-ends. I had had my pictures in every dramatic page in the world. But I wanted one little measly head and shoulders on the society page. I told him I wouldn’t take a settlement, he couldn’t offer me one big enough. He asked me if that was final. It was. He said he was sorry, picked up his stick and his gloves, bowed, and went.

“That was twelve years ago. I changed some of my politics since then. I’d take that settlement now. I fooled away a couple of years waiting and arguing with lawyers. Then I sued and forced so much a year out of him. Then he offered the same settlement if I’d change the separate maintenance to a complete divorce. I wasn’t ready yet. When I was, he had changed his mind—he was angry. He had

had a chance to marry a girl he was crazy about and I didn't let him. Now she had married, and he was bitter. He started fighting me. He shut off the allowance and tied my suit in a knot. I don't know where it is now. When I last heard from it it was up in some court with a name I can't even remember. Now I have no money to pay my lawyer, so I guess he can't remember the name, either. And I'm back in a chorus. And here's my boarding-house. Good-night."

"Wait a minute," said the director, holding her by the arm. "Say—this marrying a millionaire ain't all gravy, huh?"

"I wish I hadn't," said she. "Well, good-night."

"Just a minute. Say—you'll forget what I said to you in rehearsal—when you was dreaming."

"Certainly," said the showgirl, as she fished a key out of her bag and started to rise.

"Hold on," said the director, pressing her arm. "You know, since I was wrestling fancy interiors at the Stuyvesant I stepped along a few in the business. I'm pretty well thought of along the line. I make my two hundred good bucks a week, and I got a little bank roll planted that'd surprise you."

"I'm very glad to hear it," said she. "It was

very kind of you to bring me home. I was so tired. Good-night."

"Wait! I ain't through," said he, tightening his thumb and finger on her slender arm. "What I was going to say is this: I ain't never been married. Lots o' times I come pretty close, but marriage is a serious business with me. When I marry I want a girl what'll be the whole world to me—the whole world. Now, how much would it take to push along that there divorce o' yours? A little wad ought to make you free, and if you get alimony, all right. If you don't—I don't care. It's you, not the money——"

She drew her arm out of his clutch, turned her whole body and faced him.

"Are—are you—do I understand that you want to marry me?"

"Sure. I like you. You've got a lot o' class. I'm doing well. I did use to brag I'd never marry out of a chorus, but say——"

She laughed. He stopped.

"Why, you poor thing!" said she. "You're absurd—insolent and impossible. Marry you? Why, I'm the wife of a multi-millionaire, a member of one of the foremost families in American society."

"Why—I thought—you said——"

"Out of the question," snapped she with decision. "Can't you understand and be reasonable?"

And she opened the door of the taxi, walked across the flaggings and up the steps of the shabby flat-house, and he heard the key as it unlocked the street door.

"Broadway and Forty-fourth," said he to the driver, slamming the door. The taxi spun about and started on the back trail.

The director lit a cigarette, tossed the match out of the window, put his feet on the emergency seat, and leaned back. He scratched the back of his neck and fingered his watch charm. Block after block he saw open with a slice of light and close behind him.

"'Could I but kiss one finger of your hand,'" he hummed.

The skid-chains, tapping rhythmically against the fenders, and the monotonous croon of the engine beat time and sang with him. Over and over he droned the lyrics and the melody, the big hit of that by-gone hit.

The car pulled up sharply at his corner. The driver jumped down and swung open the door. His passenger was asleep, the cigarette was out. The driver reached in and shook him.

"Hey!" he called. "This here cab costs three dollars a hour. Are you used to sleeping in places what costs three dollars a hour? Huh?"

"No, sir," said the director, as he pulled himself together with a bang.





XI

HERITAGE OF THE SUFFERING BROTHER



XI

HERITAGE OF THE SUFFERING BROTHER

DO YOU think there's a story in this for you?" asked my friend, the old policeman who sits all day in the corridor of the city hall, who watches, who sees, who seldom tells.

I stood beside him while he told it to me—the tale a young farmer had told him at the foot of the elevator.

The young farmer was accompanied by a farmer girl. Her eyes were blue and her hair was yellow. Youth sang within her and the radiance of outdoor life illumined her. They had just come in from the depot. He carried a straw suitcase. He asked the way to the marriage license window. It is the policeman's duty to question young couples that have the appearance of elopers. So my friend, the old policeman, stopped the young farmer and asked him. Thus he got the story.

On a little farm near South Bend, Ind., twin boys were born some twenty years ago. A year or two

later a girl was born on the juxtaposed farm. The three children grew up together.

As sometimes chances, the twins were opposites in every manner. One was a wild, daring youth, mischievous, disobedient, trespassing over the bounds of all regular restrictions. The other was an orderly lad, kind to his parents, respectful to his teachers, steady at Sunday-school—a good boy.

Let us call the bad twin Bill and the good one Jack for further mention.

As was natural, Bill fell into roistering ways. He was of little help or use about the farm. The hard work and the dirty work all fell on Jack. Bill managed to get good clothes and keep them presentable. Jack seldom got any and soiled them with work when he did.

Bill gambled a bit, got to trapesing off to town often, and was a bit of a disgrace to the home folks and the countryside. Jack was always on the job, and folks said he wasn't very bright.

The girl on the next farm grew along, and she was pretty and she was good.

Bill and Jack both watched her; and both loved her.

Bill loved her because she had blue eyes and soft

hair and dimples and a rounded little form that twinkled with charms and titillated with the graces of wholesome youth.

Jack loved her because she was mild and fine; because he saw her at worship on Sundays with her hymn book, and then she wore the expression of a madonna.

Bill courted her in his wild, whooping way. He borrowed or stole or won the money to buy her shiny gifts and take her buggy riding and send her candy from town.

Jack wasn't much of a Lothario. He mostly looked sheepishly at her and blushed.

So, as was bound to happen, she chose Bill, the dashing, wayward, romantic, impetuous swain.

Bill took his victory with a swagger. Jack took his defeat hard but silently.

Many of the older folks shook their heads because they knew the little girl and loved her—the little girl who was pretty enough to dazzle the gay dog, Bill, and pure and pious enough to break the heart of the slow-going Jack.

Bill and the girl were to be married soon. His rushing courtship was on everybody's tongue. Jack's suffering was clear to everybody's eye.

Then, on the eve of the wedding, Bill grew sick. He hadn't been living just the safest sort of a life, so the ailment grew dangerous. In spite of all that they could do he died.

Jack and the girl and the folks followed the body of Bill to the churchyard. Jack went home. The girl went to her home.

Late that night there was a knock on the window of the room where Jack lay awake, tossing in his bed, thinking, wondering.

He opened his window and—there stood the girl.

She had a shawl over her head and a cloak over her nightgown. She had stolen out of the house after her parents had kissed her good-night in her room.

She told Jack something that made his blood run chill. She had loved Bill, the unscrupulous taking Bill. She had wanted to be his wife. But another reason had come that made her urge the marriage without delay. And now Bill was dead!

All his life Jack had been taking Bill's leavings. All his life he had seen Bill break his poor toys in mischief. All his life he had seen Bill take and destroy all that he had wanted. All his life he had drudged and gone without that Bill might "sport" and have.

Heritage of the Suffering Brother 217

And Bill had soiled the one thing under Heaven that he had truly loved because it was unsoiled. And Bill had died and left him the aftermath of his sins and his abandon.

The young farmer with the straw suitcase was Jack. The girl who stood, blushing, beside him, was the girl who had loved Bill.

"Do you think there's a story in that for you?" asked my friend, the policeman.





XII

ONE TOUCH OF ART



XII

ONE TOUCH OF ART

IN FRAYED pajamas, at twilight, on the edge of the bed, chin on hands, sat Jefferson Payton Garrick, actor out of a job. There came a knock at the door. Garrick rose, stripped the cover from the bed, draped it dexterously about him, as though a toga, and struck a heroic attitude.

"Enter, knocker," roared Garrick, and Delilah Dill, adolescent daughter of the boarding-house landlady, forthwith did so. "What now, harbinger of evil?"

"Ma says," said Delilah, "that if you don't pay at least one week's board to-morrow you'll find this here room missin' when you come back from your daily homecomin' around them theattical offices."

"She would dispossess me? For a few paltry ducats?"

"That's ma—she said to tell you this ain't no home for aged and disrepyoutable actors. And she said to tell you this ain't no hobos' flop, neither.

Now, you made me? To-morrow, by the clock. Ma's gotta have security or currency; and you ain't got no more trunks to grab."

"Ah, fair Delilah," sighed Garrick, "you have truly shorn me close and trimmed me good."

"You don't look like no Samson to me," said Delilah in the door. "To-morrow you'll come across or you'll get kicked out."

"Can you beat it?" said Garrick.

When Delilah had done so he sat again upon the bed, until his reverie was broken by an alien sound. He turned toward the window. A leg appeared, entering stealthily; then the other; then the remainder of a man with a checked suit and a blue necktie. The man saw Garrick, yanked a shiny revolver from his pocket, and pointed it.

"One squawk and I'll plug ye," he said.

Garrick looked frightened. The man held his position and his expression. Garrick broadened into a smile and at last began to laugh, aloud and boisterously.

"Do you see anything funny, or are you just nutty?" snapped the stranger.

"Did you ever hear about the burglar that broke in on the Arkansas editor?" asked Garrick. "The

editor was unarmed, so he engaged the burglar in hand-to-hand conflict, and it was only after a terrific struggle that he was able to rob the burglar."

"Don't come that stuff on me," said the visitor, "it's gettin' late an' I have to go t'rough dis hull building yet. Come on—slip me."

"Fool," said Garrick bitterly. "If I had money I wouldn't be here—I'd be out somewhere—eating."

"Gee!" said the burglar. "It sounds like a touch."

"I could unfold a tale——"

"Not a dime! You're de sixt' actor I starts to burgle to-night what tries to touch me."

"If you could lend me a dollar till Tuesday——"

"No chance."

"I promise not to spend it on liquor."

"Old stuff. Good-night," and the burglar started back toward his window.

"Stay," cried Garrick. "I am no common mendicant. I am an actor."

"This here ain' no place for me," said the fellow, hurrying his steps. Garrick followed and seized him by the coat tails. "Leave go o' me or I'll call a copper," cried the burglar.

"One moment," pleaded Garrick.

"Not a cent."

"I spurn your filthy alms," said Garrick. "You are a burglar. Furthermore, you are an inartistic burglar. Your costume is wrong, your make-up woefully insufficient, and your slang horribly off key. Even a vaudeville playwright wouldn't write such an impossible burglar as you are."

"Say," said the intruder, turning back, "I've worked in swell apartments, I have."

"You're *passé*," said Garrick. "The burglar of to-day is a gentleman, an evening-dressed dude, in fact."

"Well, I never had no education."

"And you'll never amount to anything. I played a burglar once, on Broadway. And if I had entered feet first as you did, wearing the grotesque garb that you affect, carrying a nickel-plated, mail-order revolver that reflects gleams from the footlights, I'd have been kicked out of the Lamb's Club. Where's your dark lantern?"

"Well, you see——"

"Excuses—always excuses! You play the character rotten, your props are missing, and you have no idea of technique. You're no burglar—you're a bungler."

"Well," said the stranger in mortification, "no—

body ever showed me. I'm a self-made gun, I am. I never had no mother or nothin'."

"Then find some other occupation," said Garrick testily. "When I was a stage manager I fired better burglars than you."

"Am I that bad?" said the prowler.

"Worse. You are the most unconvincing burglar I ever saw. Why, when I was supporting Lillian Langtry——"

"Gee! Are you as old as that?"

"Man, boy, and stock actor," said Garrick. "I have trod the boards these thirty years. I have seen brilliant child actresses become forty-dollar character women of no character; I have wrung forth the magic syllables of Shakespeare in temples of art where now they go to sleep on Mary Pickford films; I remember Sarah Bernhardt's other leg and her first two-legged farewell tour; I can recall De Wolf Hopper before Casey went to bat. Why, I knew Willie Collier when he was funny!"

"And you're broke? I thought youse actors get a lot o' money."

"Only in vaudeville," said Garrick. "And, sooner than do a superannuated song and dance like Henry Dixie, I would starve like a gentleman."

"How about moving pictures?"

"I can't ride a broncho."

"Can't you get a job in the reggeler theayters?"

"No—I no longer speak their language. My dialect is neither Yiddish enough for 'Potash and Perlmutter' nor British enough to play a German spy."

"How about musical comedy?"

"Can't get Fred Stone for a partner."

"Say," said the stranger, lowering his revolver, "how long has this been going?"

"As per my card in the *Clipper*," said Garrick, "I have been at liberty for years."

"I've only been out a few weeks."

"Lucky devil," said the actor. "You are in a business that has standards—ethics, principles. It doesn't vary with every whim of a fickle taste. It isn't dependent on the foibles of arbitrary managers."

"We have to divide wit' de bulls."

"No comparison—policemen will listen to reason; theatrical managers are beyond my understanding."

"Mine, too. I go to theayters every Tuesday night—my night off."

"Indeed—a patron of the arts?"

"No, the scalpers."

"Ah, I see, patronizing your fellow-burglars. One hand washes the other."

"Well, I wash my hands of de hull business," said the burglar. "An' dis ain't buyin' fish fer next Friday. How about it? Do I get anything?"

"Gladly," said Garrick. "If I had anything. But, you see, the landlady has bereft me of all save those pitiful wigs and beards——"

"That spinach over there?"

"Indispensable to the actor of my generation," sighed Garrick. "That was the sure-fire combination—the actor and the whiskers—ham and spinach. Those are the remnants of my former grandeurs in the one-night stands."

"Them ain't no good to me; I don't wear no disguises."

"You don't need any. You're a caricature now."

"Well, then, I'll stow the cannon, an' I guess I'll be goin'."

"Wait!" cried the actor. "An inspiration! Is that four-dollar gun loaded?"

"Sure; my wife loads it for me every mornin'. Now, there's some gal. She waits on me like a nurse, and she's got eyes—say!"

"I know, like stars, and teeth like pearls, and all

that. But gramercy on your domestic felicities. I want you to do me a service. Blow my brains out."

"This here gat can't shoot nothin' what ain't there."

"A comedian!" said Garrick, shaking his head sadly. "And I thought you were a heavy!"

"I can't take no long chances like dat—fer nuttin'. I'll tell you what—here, you take de cannon an' do it yerself."

"Never!" cried Garrick. "Suicide? Suicide by the hero? Unheard of. The play would be a hopeless failure."

"Good-night," said the burglar, starting toward the window.

"Wait—I have it."

"Keep it."

"Hold! How would you like to take home to that devoted female artillery expert five thousand dollars?"

"Kiddin' somebody?"

"Nobody."

Garrick turned to the chiffonier, opened a drawer, and took out a folded document.

"You know what this is? You do not? This is

an insurance policy on my life for five thousand dollars."

"I get you—if I drills your bean I collects."

"Precisely. You are a better business man than you are a burglar. This policy would naturally go to my daughter. She has proven ungrateful. King Lear certainly knew what he was kicking about. My daughter married a critic, and I disowned her. Now, I'll sign this instrument over to you; and if I die, five thousand; if I live, nothing."

"Gee, that puts it right up to me, don't it?"

"Have you a fountain pen?"

"Sure," said the visitor, handing a gold-chased one.

"All burglars carries fountain pens."

"So I have noticed on bank cashiers, lawyers, book agents, and booking agents. What did you say the name was?"

"Slattery," said the burglar. "Slickey Slattery."

"To Slickey Slattery—for love and affection," repeated Garrick as he wrote.

Slattery took the policy, looked it over, and put it in his pocket.

"All right," said he. "Now, how do ye wanna die, sittin' or standin'?"

"Put down that abominable pistol!" cried Gar-

rick. "I can't die like a rummy. I must have atmosphere—the artistic inspiration, the exuberance of my art."

"If ye're lookin' fer dat from me you'll die of old age," said Slickey.

"I shall supply it," answered Garrick haughtily. "In order to face death with the proper courage, aye, even with joy, I shall set the stage and play for you the climax of an exquisite tragedy. I shall carry myself into it. When the moment comes for the hero to die, you will fire and I shall expire with the smile of a martyr. What a triumph for realism! Now, mark me well and watch me closely. You sit there. You are the audience and I the player. I shall play for you the historic finale of 'Nathan Hale.'"

"Don't know him," said Slickey.

"Nathan Hale, the patriot," said Garrick exalted. "He died for his country two hundred and forty-seven consecutive times at Daly's Theatre when it was in its prime.

"I place this chair—that is to be the scaffold. It is morning. Over yonder verdant hills the sun of an autumn morning rises to look upon a nation's catastrophe. The little birds are twittering and the

wind through yonder imaginary branches sighs as though in penitential requiem. The kindly villagers have risen early to gaze upon the execution of their idol. They are banked in lines, here and there, weeping, whispering, wondering.

"Ah—who comes there? That stalwart, handsome figure—head erect, eyes flashing, his hands bound behind him, flanked on all sides by murderous cut-throats in scarlet uniforms? Nathan Hale! Resolutely, asking no pity, he marches to his doom and into history—thus. The crowd stirs. He mounts the scaffold. A deep voice is heard:

"'Nathan Hale, what have you to say before you are executed by order of his Majesty, King George, as a spy!' He hisses it—'s-s-spy!'

"The crowd is hushed. Even the birds and the wind seem silent, listening. There seems to be a smile upon the handsome features as Nathan Hale, looking upward to yonder realm whence heroes draw their inspiration, answers—in a clarion that rang around the then civilized world and echoed through the pages of text-books evermore, he answers:

"'I regret that I have but one life to give to my country.'"

Garrick tore the coat of his pajama suit open and

bared his breast. Slattery looked at him a moment, then began to sniffle and wipe his eyes with the sleeve of his coat.

"Well," cried Garrick angrily. "Why didn't you shoot, you pinhead? That was the cue. 'Country'—'one life to give to my country,' that's where he dies."

"I couldn't," whimpered Slattery. "You made me cry. That there was the saddest thing I ever see in my hull life."

"A pretty compliment," said Garrick, "but gets us nowhere. I see you are too easily touched."

"I ain't as easy to touch as some people thinks," said Slattery, removing from his hip pocket a wallet of goodly corpulence and placing it in his inner coat pocket, after which he buttoned the coat.

"Hopeless," exclaimed Garrick. "Now listen, blockhead, numbskull, boob. I'm going to give you one more chance. Did you ever hear of Fagin?"

"I knew a man once named Ragin."

"Fagin was a Jew——"

"Wrong guy. Ragin was a Mick."

"Fagin appeared in a book by a man named Dickens. It was called 'Oliver Twist,' though that was but a minor rôle. He died a tragic death, especially

in Milwaukee. I shall perform for you the ghastly finish. Follow me closely. This is a cell. The lights are low. The air is dank. Yonder the bars shut the whining, clawing, hysterical Fagin from his liberty. The coward's fear has driven him mad—mad, I tell you——” And Garrick executed the death scene, rose to the finish and fell to the floor, his head away from the side where Slattery sat.

Slattery, who had become more and more frightened as the scene progressed, at the finish staggered back, then collected himself and, with stealthy steps, started for the window. Garrick, having counted ten, turned his head without rising.

“Hey,” called Garrick. “Where are you going?”

Slattery stopped as though shot, shivering and hesitating.

“I—I—I was just going over there—I——”

Garrick swung around and sat up, facing toward Slattery, holding his knees in his clasped hands.

“Sneak thief!” he cried. “Pickpocket! Cur! You were going to desert me—desert old Fagin. Why didn't you shoot me, you blundering idiot? Can't you tell a death scene when you see one?”

“Gee! you scared the liver outta me. My mitt trembled till I couldn't pull de trigger.”

"So you tried to abandon me. Now, listen. I'll give you one more opportunity. I will play you Shylock. Shylock was an old man, as you will see by this wig that I am about to adjust. He was a moneylender."

"Well, why didn' you go to him?"

"Atrocious! Now, pay strict attention. Shylock had just been disgraced, defeated. His thirst for Christian blood has strangled in his throat. Broken, muttering, maniacal, with faltering step he goes forth, tearing from his bosom a diatribe against mankind——" And Garrick tore into the exit speech of Shylock.

After a few words of the soliloquy Slattery raised his pistol, and, taking careful aim, levelled it at the breast of Garrick, who, hot in the fervor of his speech, saw him, stopped abruptly, and threw his arm over his crape-haired face.

"Stop! Put it down. What do you mean?" he demanded.

"One more second you'd been a dead duck."

"But why, imbecile? I played you two sublimely horrible death scenes and twice you flivvered. And now, in the midst of an oration that has nothing to do with death, you would murder me. Why?"

"Because you're rotten."

"Indeed?" retorted Garrick. "Go get a typewriter and a cigarette like the other critics, and get barred out of the Shubert theatres. I see you have no soul for art and no appreciation of the classics. I will come to the level that meets with your infinitesimal brow. I will do for you 'The Face on the Bar-room Floor.' The finish of it is, 'He fell across the picture, dead.' As I say 'dead,' you fire. Remember—'He fell across the——'"

Garrick turned. He looked at Slattery to see whether the burglar was paying close attention. He looked more keenly. Slattery, fallen against the rail of the bed, was fast asleep. Garrick took him by the arm. Slattery snored. There was a knock on the door. Garrick, with a sudden idea, extracted the wallet from the burglar's pocket and hid it in the chiffonier drawer, lifted Slattery on the bed, and covered him in a heap with the quilts, turned toward the door with a greeting, and saw Delilah enter.

"Is it not enough," he cried, "that you hound my days, but you must batter at my doors in the calm of the evening?"

"Ma says," said Delilah, "she wants to know are you gonna fade away to-morrow, 'cause they's an-

other ham wants to move in here and he wants to pay three dollars in advance."

"Pish—tush," said Garrick loftily. "Who speaks of three dollars? For that pittance you disturb my siesta?" and he walked to the drawer and took out the wallet. "Take that—and that—and that——"

"Why, Mr. Garrick——"

"Ah, it's Mr. Garrick now. Stifle your insolent questions. How dare you? Have my trunk sent up forthwith. And, here—I would have a light collation. I wish pea soup, green onions, three squabs, some truffles, mushrooms, asparagi—that is the plural of asparagus—I wish plural asparagus; an apple pie, not one act of a pie—a whole production; and beer, luscious, foaming, German, amber beer. Can you get that kind of beer for this kind of dough?"

"Why, sir—yes, sir——"

"And, mind you—I want service. Service, or I'll move out of this bush-league boarding-house. And here—give this to the ragged tank trouter who presumed to cast eyes on my room. Tell him to buy himself a clean shirt. And here—this is a slight honorarium for you."

"Oh, thanks, Mr. Garrick," gasped Delilah. "Ma'll

be so tickled and s'prised. Only I can't help wondering how——"

"How I got it? I earned it—through my acting."

Delilah ran on her errand, and Garrick strode to the bed. He took the revolver from Slattery's limp fingers and then kicked him in a most unguarded location. Slattery began to yawn, sat up, stretched, and rubbed his eyes.

"Now exit, upper left, through window," directed Garrick, indicating with the pistol.

Slattery felt quickly for the wallet.

"Stung!" he cried. "Say, you ain't gonna chase me outta here—broke?"

"You'd better get a move on, or begin to sing a hymn," said Garrick, and Slattery started backing toward the window.

"Ain't you gonna divvy with me—after all I suffered?"

"Not a cent," said Garrick imperiously. "So I murdered Shakespeare, did I? And you went to sleep, did you? Why, I've never been so——"

Garrick stepped forward and snatched the policy out of Slattery's pocket.

"What do you mean, ruffian? You would rob me

of my policy? Go—and remember honesty is the best policy, especially in this New York life.”

“How do I get out?” asked Slattery, with a sigh of resignation. “De way I come in?”

“No,” said Garrick, shoving him out of the window. “Head first.”

Delilah entered with a huge tray of steaming food.

“What was that funny noise I just hear, Mr. Garrick?” she said.

“Oh, I was merely rehearsing a new version of ‘Oliver Twist.’ Fagin has just thrown Bill Sykes out of the window.”

“Well, it ain’t that way in the book,” said Delilah. “Fagin dies.”

“Not always,” said Garrick. “Only when played by Nat Goodwin.”



XIII

IT WASN'T HONEST, BUT IT WAS SWEET



XIII

IT WASN'T HONEST, BUT IT WAS SWEET

SICKLES was a loan shark. It isn't a pretty business. Sickles wasn't any prettier than his business. He had only one eye, but that eye was on the main chance. His idea of the greatest man of all times was the man who invented interest.

Sickles was married. His wife was a decent lady, who had been his head bookkeeper. So she knew many of the tricks of his trade, and when he gave her the household money on Saturday nights she blushed.

Considerable literature has been made about mortgage-shavers, tax sale hyenas, and usurers. A loan shark with a heart never broke into the classics very hard. Shylock and Old Scrooge are the standbys. And, generally speaking, this is as it should be. It isn't a pretty business.

The loan shark is a commercializer of distress, disease, death, failure, thunder-clap, and lightning bolt. Folks never come to him unless they are flat against the rough bricks. He knows that and is pre-

pared. If you start your story he can finish it. He knows them all. He can look at you and tell how much you want and how much you'll get and how long he'll wait. His ace in the hole is your shame at coming to him and he collects with that facedown, lowdown card.

Mrs. Sickles skimmed a little off the stingy domestic allowance and doled it to beggars, while Sickles was drinking his coffee at home with milk instead of cream and smiling joyfully at the possession of an economical wife.

A newspaper in the city got an idea. It suggested that folks get little tin banks and put a dime a day or whatever they could or would into them and save up for the poor the coins they wouldn't miss. Mrs. Sickles thought well of the idea. She showed it to Sickles at the breakfast table.

"Tin bank—tin bank," said Sickles, and he hurried to his office.

But Mrs. Sickles couldn't get the thought out of her head. A tin bank! There was something sweet about it. It wasn't a forensic plea for noble charity. It was such a simple way to put it—such an easy way to do such a wonderful thing.

So, with a guilty feeling, she cut a hole into a cocoa

It Wasn't Honest, But It Was Sweet 243

can, a jagged slit. She held the can in her left hand, and with her right she dropped a dime through it. It tinkled against the bottom of the can. She jumped. It was a very pleasant sound. But it wasn't honest.

She sighed. How she would have liked to drop dimes in that little tin can every hour, and take them out again and drop them in the trembling palm of the poor. She compromised on a dime a day. It grew to be a regular and sacred ceremony. After Sickles left in the morning and she had watched him around the corner, hurrying to the elevated station, she tiptoed to her bureau, took out a dime, tiptoed to the kitchen, pussy-footed into the pantry, reached up on a high shelf, took down the tin bank, and rattled it.

How the sound grew more solid and how perceptible the weight increased by putting in that one dime a day.

Then she would poise the can in her left hand and hold it up and with her right would slip in the day's mite, rattle her treasure again, and put it up in its hiding-place. It was a glorious secret—heavy but thrilling.

There was one touch of sadness about it to Mrs. Sickles. She could never help thinking somehow

that if little Ella had lived she would have taken her in on the secret, and little Ella would have understood and cherished it. But little Ella was in the grave—had been for years. My—she would have been a big girl now. However——

The days went on, and unto each day was the dime thereof tinkled into its hiding-place. It was growing cold. Winter was asserting itself. Cases of suffering were beginning to creep into the newspapers. It would soon be time to open the bank.

Mrs. Sickles almost dreaded the thought. There was so much joy in putting the dimes in the bank that she would feel bereft when they went. But of course they were there for giving, and of course the dimes meant nothing to her—only what they could do for the needy; only that.

Mrs. Sickles still gave to an occasional beggar. Beggars were plentiful, and as it grew colder they became more so. To some of them she gave bread and to some of them nothing, because she couldn't feed the whole army. But she gave discriminatingly and as freely as she could.

And then one day came a woman knocking at the back door. She wore a shawl, and under it on her arm was a baby, asleep. The woman was frail and

the child was heavy, so Mrs. Sickles asked her into the kitchen to rest and warm up. She made a cup of hot coffee for her and took the child in her own arms. It was a girl, and it looked somewhat like little Ella had looked when she was a baby.

The woman thanked her and seemed embarrassed. It was her first day at begging, and she didn't do it very well. She said that her husband was in the bridewell for having thrown a chair through a saloon window and that he had sold everything salable in their two rooms on his last spree—everything except the stove. The stove, she said, was somewhat ornate for them. It had been given them as a wedding present by the boys who worked in the shop where she had worked until she got married. The stove cost \$33 and it was nickel-plated.

She said he would have sold the stove long ago, but for a chattel mortgage. Her husband had put a \$15 plaster on it. She had paid more than \$30 since then in nickels, dimes, and quarters toward the principal, for interest, and as interest on the interest to keep the mortgage man from taking it away and she still owed \$4.10.

The man had been to her house that morning and he had given her till five o'clock that afternoon to get

the \$4.10 or out would go the stove. When the stove went out—well, it was winter, the baby was so young, there weren't even any covers in the house to speak of—she didn't know what would happen when it got colder.

Mrs. Sickles walked to the pantry, stood on her tiptoes, and reached up on the high shelf. She came back with a tin box in her hand that rattled as she walked.

"Here," she said. "There are forty-three dimes in that box—I counted them as I dropped them in. Go and pay off that wretched man and keep your stove."

The woman smiled and cried. She took the tin bank in one hand and the baby on the other arm and went happy. She got on a street car, for she had to go downtown, and there was 20 cents to spare in the bank. She went to an office building and counted out forty-one dimes to Sickles and went home and hugged the baby in the warm spot on the floor beside the stove.



XIV

TEN DOLLARS' WORTH



XIV

TEN DOLLARS' WORTH

YOU have heard of writing against time. You may have heard of writing against space. But have you ever heard of writing on space? It is a trade idiom belonging to the confidential glossary of a newspaper office. The space writer is usually, though not always, a free lance who gets news that staff reporters do not, and who sells his news to one or more city editors and receives for it not a salary or retainer but so much per column or fraction thereof, which means his pay is measured by the typed space that his stories occupy in the paper, and thence the title "space writer."

To those who see and know a great many things that seem highly interesting or important, which they do not subsequently see in print anywhere, it would seem that the space writer has a lucrative field and should do well at \$5 a column, not counting headline space, which is the standard of compensation. Maybe he should. But I never saw one unless he was

especially endowed or unless he enjoyed star assignments because of unusual attainment and was paid high rates and given free play, who ever bought diamond rings or fur-lined coats on the emoluments of writing on space.

The space man is generally a broken-down old reporter who has outlived that efficiency which is demanded by an editorial pay roll, or one who has tried to get a regular reportorial job and for some reason never landed, or a hanger-on at some source of possible news which does not erupt regularly enough to be worth while "covering" by a salaried man.

Sometimes he is a college student who adds to his stingy allowance by selling an occasional item about what the professor said in class or about who will lead the march at the co-eds' campus hop. Sometimes he is a physician who turns in stories of queer and weird operations, or a lawyer who tells of intricate points of law in Supreme Court decisions that affect everybody and bore everybody. Sometimes the space writer is valuable and useful. Usually he is a nuisance. He is even, in some instances, a charity object whose paragraphs of unimpressive news are bought and printed to help the poor, well-meaning

devil out. In all circumstances he is a semi-outsider and his output is a by-product of reportorial organization. He is not momentous. But he may be interesting.

And the old Globe Girdler was that.

He couldn't have been a day less than sixty. He had hung around the same suburban police station since long before the oldest reporter was a young reporter. He belonged in it as much as either of its two cells and he was just as rusty. He was permitted many privileges because, though he was a glutton for space, he never broke a confidence. It was his pride that he had digested many a great story that for reasons of great friendships he had held out. Sure enough, some strippling reporter had most always gotten the story sooner or later, and it was printed anyway and the Globe Girdler got nothing for it. But he had done his share. He never compromised with his sense of honor.

That was why, maybe, he never made more than about \$8 a week. Nobody had ever known him to turn up or turn in a story of any consequence.

He could get more names of Polish families at a midnight fire—loss \$218, covered by insurance—than any other living note-taker, and he telephoned every

last one of them in to some rewrite man who was busy and really had no time to make believe he was writing them down at the other end of the wire. He gave descriptions to the final petal of the ceremonies at the outlying station when a new desk sergeant was inducted into office, and then hunted the paper through and found three lines in the "City Brevities" about it, which he clipped and pasted and turned in and for which he got twenty cents by the column rule. But if there was a secret police intrigue, or if a stranger reported to the desk that his daughter had eloped with a prince, the Girdler either never knew it or never told about it.

His principal occupation was reminiscing. How he could go back into the past! He could imitate the talk of that detective and the walk of that inspector and tell how he set the spark which some other reporter stole to set a flame that made the other reporter famous in a night.

Furthermore, he had been all over the world, to hear him tell of the strange countries he had visited, and his nickname grew therefrom. He was a little shaky in his geography, history, physiography, deep-sea navigation, cross-country mapmaking, and other sciences of the traveller. But he talked as readily

about the Himalayas as though he had really seen them, described the equator and told how he had risen at sunrise to get a clearer view of it, and took his listeners about the world as sure-footedly as though he actually believed he had been in the places he told of. If he did believe it, he was alone. No one else did, though no one ever told him so.

Perhaps it is unjust to say no one else believed it. Lottie may have believed it. Lottie Kranz was her whole name. She was the sole night shift of the little all-night lunchroom a few doors down from the station.

It was at the counter of the lunchroom that the Girdler spun his bravest stories of the baying walruses he had strangled single-handed on the shores of the Bay of Fundy; the camels he had ridden over the vineyards of Australia, and the Sultan of Bulgaria, who had begged him to stay and be his prime minister or his general of Zouaves.

The policemen smoked stogies and listened and wondered—wondered how he could get himself so twisted and tangled when he had the whole face of the ball of earth to roam about in his narratives. And Lottie listened and wondered, too. Lottie had not travelled far nor read extensively. It was all

new and strange to her. The only camel she had ever seen was in a free zoo. It was very fascinating to hear this vivid veteran rover tell of the wild, weird foreigners—men and beasts—as though they were not wonderful.

Lottie served the Globe Girdler cup of coffee after cup of coffee, rich with extra cream, just to hold him there as long as possible and hear him talk. He was at his best in his cups—coffee cups. He never was asked to pay a check. Eleven years before, the wife of the owner of the little lunchroom had eloped with a plumber, and the Globe Girdler had not sent anything to the papers about it. The papers all had something about it. But not from the Girdler. Thereafter and forever he was the guest of the house.

Night after night he held forth in the beanery with his tales of long ago. Why he had made these pilgrimages he never told. When, he never discussed. Were they totalled from his own chronicles, he was 674 years old and had spent all that time in savage climes, not counting at all the twenty or more years in which he had not missed a night at the station, and during which time he could not, therefore, have wandered abroad to speak of. He let it be known that in his youth he had enjoyed an independent

income from a huge estate—a family affair, with a crest that he didn't care to talk about too intimately.

It grew tiresome after an hour or two any evening, and by 2 A. M. the Girdler usually found himself with Lottie as his lone listener. That was when he was at his best, freed of all restraint of congruity and consistency, and to Miss Kranz he told tales such as no wanderer ever had brought back to civilization at the hourly risk of life itself. To each tale Lottie would say "Gee—ain't that the limit?" and pour him more chickory.

Each Tuesday afternoon, with his "string" neatly pasted on slips of paper just column-length, the Girdler appeared at the city room of the newspaper and received an order at \$5 per column for the column and fraction thereof that he presented. He was scrupulously honest in money. He never turned in for pay what he had not turned in for news. And he always was given the benefit of the split inch, and he never asked for more and never voiced a grievance in the office.

But one Tuesday he stood with his order in his hand at the city editor's desk and that official turned and asked what he was waiting for.

"I—you see—that is," began the Globe Girdler, "I've been thinking."

"Write me a hundred words about that—that's a front-page item," said the city editor..

"I've been thinking," said the Girdler, sidestepping the shaft, "that I've had an adventurous and exciting career. I've been all over the world, up and down and across. I've been immensely wealthy, and there's a little blue blood in me that would sound pretty good. And then, I've been around that one station so long that I'm a landmark—everybody around there knows me, and a lot of people are interested in me. I've——"

"What's all this leading up to?" cut in the city editor.

"Well," said the Girdler, "I was just thinking that it will be a pretty good story when—when—you know, when I die."

"Why, you're not thinking of dying?"

"No—no, I'm good for years yet—many years. But when I do die, as I said, it ought to make a pretty good story."

"Yes—I suppose so. Never thought of it that way."

"Worth a column or more, maybe. What do you

think?" said the Girdler, looking into the city editor's face for the verdict.

"Oh, that would depend in part on the circumstances of the—but why talk about it?"

"Because I was thinking that when I die it will be worth some space in view of my past and my acquaintances, and my long residence in the city, and somebody will write it. I, of course, won't write it, as I will be dead. But it will be worth space. And I won't get paid for it, will I? I can't turn in the story of my own death, can I?"

"You've been scooped on stories that were pretty nearly as close to you as that, so I guess you'll miss out on that one, too," said the city editor. "What is all this about?"

"I want to write my own obituary—write it now and get my space for it. The few details of the last illness can be easily filled in later. When I die that will be in my territory of course. And, since you admit it will be worth space, and since somebody will write it and get paid for it, who is more entitled to it than I am? Who knows as much about me as I do? Who——"

"Here," said the city editor. "I see your viewpoint. But I never heard of anything so absurd.

I've heard of autobiographies, but never of an obituary. What put such an idea in your head?"

"I'll tell you the truth," said the Girdler. "I need ten dollars the worst possible way. I've planned and pondered and I don't know where or how to get it. I fell on this idea of writing my own obit and selling it to the paper. You'll need it some time, anyway. I'm old and getting older. You might need it soon. Anyway, it's an asset worth buying—let me write it and you can pay me space for it and put it on the files for use when released by my death. It's gambling in a future, I realize that. But I must have ten dollars. That's two columns, isn't it? My—that's a lot. It will be the biggest story I ever wrote. But I can give you two columns of hot obit about myself. I was born in——"

"Never mind that," said the city editor. "Write your notice. I'll pay you out of my own pocket and I'll carry the investment. Then, when it is negotiable, I'll sell it to the paper. I hope that will not be for many years and——"

"Done," cried the Girdler. "I wouldn't do this, only I need the ten dollars for something terribly important—vital, I might say. I'll have the obit for you day after to-morrow."

On Thursday he brought it in, written by hand and in fine penmanship.

"It will measure a little over two columns—a trifle," said he. "But let it go at \$10."

He got the \$10 and hurried off, smiling.

The city editor glanced over it later that evening. He learned in the first line that the Globe Girdler's name was Felix Eppes Hazelton. He had never even suspected it before. The Globe Girdler was the Globe Girdler—think of finding him Felix Eppes Hazelton. Not that the name meant anything, but to think that the old Girdler had a name—and such a funny name.

In the bombastic and eulogistic style *sui generis* to the life stories of the dead it spun on through its 3,000 and more words a confused narrative of incredible adventures, explorations, distinctions at hands of barbaric royalty and exotic data culled from stray reading and translated with inaccurate imagination. The final paragraph dismissed the matter of the double decade in local journalism as follows:

"Having tired of the chameleon life of the soldier of fortune, wanderer, and sojourner, Hazelton came to this city and entered upon a career of service to the daily press to which he devoted the remainder of

his life with the same earnestness, enthusiasm, and devotion that he had given in his earlier years to seeing the unseen, meeting tribes no white man had ever met before and few since, and circumnavigating the globe. He settled down to reportorial work and applied his natural talents and the experiences that he had gleaned in contact with all manner of men toward brightening the columns of the daily press. He was engaged in this work to the day of his unfortunate and premature demise."

The city editor dropped the manuscript.

"Poor old Girdler," he said, and smiled, then shook his head.

A copy boy entered with a telegram. The city editor opened it. It was dated at a suburb. It read as follows:

"Add at end of my obit following paragraph: 'Hazelton is survived by a handsome young widow, who was Miss Lottie Kranz of this city.'

"GIRDLER."



XV

THE GANGSTER'S ELEGY



XV

THE GANGSTER'S ELEGY

WELL, the boys makes a pretty solid front for the funeral when it comes to layin' away the Gashouse Kid. A lot o' the old-timers what ain't been seen aroun' these corners much since the police broke up the distric' turns out. They was eleven automobiles, an' if the ground had have caved in aroun' the Kid's grave an' swallowed all what was there they wouldn' 'a' ben a pocket picked or a box yegged that night in Chi. That's what we thought o' the Kid. Is that there good enough?

The Kid wasn' no grifter. But they all loved 'im. He was such a nice, quiet little guy, he was, for his business—if you can call it a business. The newspapers calls him a gunman an' a slugger. But he wasn't them.

He was pretty nifty with his mitts, an' for a little sucker he packs a kick in his right what'd jar a buildin'. He carried his brass knucks in his pencil pocket an' when he reaches for 'em he always looks

so harmless the other guy never knew he slipped 'em on till he come to in the emergency ward. But that there wasn' his reg'lar business. He had a job in the city hall. He didn' go there much, but the job was there, anyway. Them other things he done for politics an' to take care of his friends. There wasn' nobody what'd swing faster or harder for a pal than the Gashouse Kid. Do you wonder we was all for 'im?

Well, when it got pretty hot aroun' 'lection an' it looks like our alderman is gonna get took good, a lot o' welchin' pups slides out f'm under an' goes over to where it looks like a soft fall. But not the Kid. He's up to his hip in the battle. He digs up a couple o' the crawfish an' he gives 'em a line o' talk, an' when that don' get 'im nothin' he wheels one of 'em on the side of 'is head an' knocks 'im forty feet f'm his necktie. That there comes off pretty reg'lar for a week or so, an' a few of 'em get together an' figures it out that the Kid is gotta be stopped.

He gets a hunch sent his way to lay off. That night he goes lookin' for the gang what's framin' on 'im 'an he hangs a haymaker on the high guy's ear an' some rat takes a shot at 'im f'm a doorway, an' a couple o' dicks comes runnin an' that breaks up

the arg'ment. Next day the Kid gets hepped to who it was pulled that there rod, an' of course he sends 'im word that he'll croak 'im an' goes lookin' for 'im. The guy ducks. The Kid says the town ain't big enough to hold 'im an' he better blow if he wan's to keep on walkin' aroun'.

Next night the crowd o' cheap thieves an' alley-rustlers gets together an' they picks three handy boys to get the Gashouse Kid.

'The Kid is standin' in Turk McGregor's bar drinkin' with the Turk, when the 'phone rings an' the bartender calls the boss. The Turk comes back after he talks an' he calls the Kid to one side an' he says:

"I was just talkin' with Bull Glunz. He says they's three o' them left-handed swill-box robbers out to settle you. They're on their way over here now."

"All right," says the Kid. "I better not let 'em start no rough stuff in here," an' he starts for the door.

The Turk takes 'im by the shoulder.

"You stick right here," says he. "We got a few good lads here an' we'll give 'em a run."

"Le' go o' me," says the Kid. "Wit' the coppers

sloughin' joints for a guy spittin' on the floor, you can't stand for no shootin' in here. What's the use o' my gettin' you in Dutch?"

"Never mind me," says the Turk. "We'll——"

"Will you?" says the Kid. "Well, you won't. I guess I'll take mine out in the open where I got room to swing."

The Kid drinks his drink, puts down his good dough, an' walks out. The Turk follows 'im, beggin' 'im not to take on them three. But the Kid he waves 'im off an' he stands on the sidewalk, whistlin' kind o' quiet, an' he looks up an' down, an' just as the Turk gets to the doorway a big red car pulls up to the curb about a hundred feet down.

The Kid starts down that way. He's got a gat under his arm an' he's got his hand under his coat. He gets halfway over when a bullet spits out o' the back o' the car, through the isinglass panel. The Kid t'rows up his hands an' he's got his cannon in his right, an' he tries to pull, but his knees doubles up under 'im an' he goes down like his clo's ain't got nothin' in 'em an' his gun falls in the gutter.

The Turk makes a break for 'im on the run. He hears a lever bein' slipped in start, he hears a gear-shift grind, he sees the smoke come outta the ex-

haust an' the big red car is on the getaway. Five minutes later the Turk an' two other good men dumps the Gashouse Kid on a sofa in his flat an' the Kid's wife is screamin' an' callin' on the saints.

That there is how the Kid got his. An' a finer little gent never thrun a brick or swung a sap.

Well, it was up to us to give 'im a sendoff and, as I says, nobody couldn't 'a' asked no finer funeral. His lodge buries 'im, an' if you'd 'a' heard that there service you'd 'a' done what all of us done. You'd 'a' pulled your little rag an' cried. It was beautiful.

We gets together after the funeral an' there's a lot o' wonderin' who was in that car where that shot come from. We all got a pretty close guess, but nobody knows exac'ly. The alderman he hits the table an' he says he'll give a thousan' bucks toward makin' it worth while for some guy to croak the guy what croaked the Kid. Somebody else tosses in two hundred an' pretty soon they's over t'ree thousan' dollars for a revenge fund.

We takes four hundred outta that an' we buys a granite shaft to go over the Kid's grave in Calvary. An' it stands there now, an' there ain't many aroun' it what's got anything on it. A committee o' t'ree was selected for to buy the stone an' write the in-

scription. It was Chimp Carter, Johnny Lavelle, an' Gene the Greek. An' here's what they cuts on that stone:

Here lies the body of

G. HALLINAN¹

The Gashouse Kid.

He fought the good fight and he
died like a man.

Peace be unto the souls of them
what got him. Amen.

Swell, wasn't it? They must' a' got somebody to make that up for 'em.

Well, we starts out lookin' for them t'ree tough boys. The Turk says he didn' see the number on the red car becus the smoke come out an' covers it up. But they ain't no two big red cars aroun' the distric' with a bullet hole in the back panel, an' pretty soon we hear where the car is. We find out who hired it—Buck Mellinger. So we lay for Buck an' we gets 'im in a little room off Shrimsky's an' Gene the Greek slips a dirk again' his ribs an' Buck swears he don' know nothin'. He says he got that there car to go out in the country an' when he comes out o' his house it ain't there. We know Buck wasn't in it

when the shootin' was pulled off, becus Buck was a quiet party an' that wasn' his graft, never.

Gene the Greek, he was the Kid's tightest pal an' he takes it harder, maybe, than even the rest of us. He's huntin' an' snoopin' an' askin' ticklish questions aroun' an' even he don' get nowhere. It looks like only the t'ree guys what was in on the job is hep an' they ain't squawkin'.

Well, mont's goes by. They's pretty near t'ree t'ousan' bucks waitin' for the boy what blows a tunnel t'rough the sharpshooter what unbelted f'm inside that there car. An' not'in's doin'. The alderman holds the coin an' he keeps us all rememberin' that there it is. An' there ain't a lad in our end o' the graft what wouldn' take a chance after that bank roll an' to square up for what them bottom-dealers done the Kid.

Gene he's got a sweetheart, a blond Swede what never was on the level wit' nobody. She'd been cheatin' an' deliverin' the work so long she didn' believe herself. She useta do a little shopliftin' when she wasn' too lazy—or too busy keepin' cases on her own twisted lies to Gene. The Greek sticks by her, though, an' once when she's nailed cold by a private hopper what's hired by a department store

an' who don' take no back kiddin' f'm the alderman or nobody, Gene ups wit' four hundred bones cash bond what she blows an' he stands for the break, though it wasn' comin' none too fast for him, at that.

He was a gambler, Gene was—none o' your cigar store crap shooters, either. He'd play anybody anyt'ing for any dough or any part of it. But his graft had went wit' the rest when the bulls roused the good corners an' he was just gettin' by. But they was always enough for Swede Frieda—yes, enough for her, an' what she slips away where Gene wasn' supposed to know.

Well, Gene kites out down the state where he hears they's a game runnin' to clean up a little bundle. He tells Frieda he'll be gone a week or ten days. She cries Swede tears an' she says she'll be mighty lonely, an' Gene, who ain't nobody's cluck, can take that or leave it. He swallows it an' smiles one o' them smiles what only a Greek an' a stud player can smile an' he says nothin', only he'll be lonely, too.

He gets to the town what's supposed to be busted wide open an' he finds t'ree newsboys pitchin' dimes an' a whist tournament for the Belgians. He's just got time to back-track on a rattler an' he don' take no layover to send Frieda a wire or nothin', but he

heaves into the flat at eight that night. The Greek breezes in t'rough the front door just in time to see a husky guy take a back window, an' he blazes at him an' don' hit nothin'. An' there stands Frieda.

"Who was thata gink?" says Gene.

"A—he's just a frien' o' mine," says Frieda.

"Whata he do here when I'm away, ha?" says Gene.

"He—well, he—I——"

Gene walks acrost an' he slaps Frieda on the jaw an' she lights on her ear in a corner. The Greek puts up his hardware an' he starts for the door. He's boilin', an' that Greek is got a nasty disposition when he's that way.

He gets half to the door an' he turns an' as he does Frieda kinda groans like. An' Gene weakens. He's kinda soft when he's that way.

An' in a minute he's over in that corner on his knees, with that no good Swede's head in his hands, kissin' her an' sayin', "Gooda, kid—no, no—daddy no hitta—no, no."

An' she opens her eyes an' she pulls herself up on her feet an' he stands up, too, an' she kinda nurses the side of her head where Gene clouted her an' she swallows hard an' chokes once or twice an' then she

lets loose an earful o' language that would a' made a cab driver sick.

"You penny-ante, Castle Garden banana peddler," she says. "You short-card bluffer," says she. "You hit me? You lay me out? Me? Me what's got more reg'lar men shootin' fer a crooked look f'm me than'd talk to you, you ignorant scum o' Europe, you. Well, that's the blow-off. Here's curtains for you, Gene the Greek," she roars. "I give you a lot o' class, I did, but f'm now on I don' know you," an' she swings aroun' an' reaches for her hat.

"Just a minute," says the Greek. "I'ma sorry for whatta I done. Let's take a fresh deal an' it's a' righta."

"May be it's a'righta for you, you swine," says Frieda. "But get this straight—it ain't a'righta for me. An' it ain't never gonna be. Get outta my way—I'm goin' t'rough that door."

"Yes, you are," says Gene. "You taka off the hat an' bringa the grub. I didn't have on train to eat nothin'."

"Git your own cold scraps like you was used to before I starts cookin' for you, you busted fourflush," Frieda kicks back, an' she gets as far as Gene's arm, what's stuck out straight between her an' the door.

"If you wanna leava this flat—my flat," says Gene, quiet an' cold, "you go outta de back winda like de yellow quitter what he was here when I come in, he went," says Gene.

Frieda's eyes are burnin'. She knows it ain' no use givin' Gene no arg'ment an' less use to give him no rough house. She takes a deep breat' an' she looks him square in the eyes an' she says:

"Gene, you step aside an' lemme beat it outta here peaceful an' quiet. An' if you don't I'll stand this here joint as far on end you'll have to get a ladder to crawl f'm the sink to the piano."

"Who's gonna do all that?" says Gene.

"Me," says Frieda, thumpin' her chest. "Me an' somebody else. Don't you kid yourself that that guy what makes a getaway t'rough that there window is yellow. He ain't afraid o' you or no dozen like you. I tipped him to vamp when I hears you at the door 'cause I didn't want no trouble here."

"They'd a been plenty de trouble," says Gene.

"You said somethin'," says Frieda. "That there guy was Butch Conway."

"Butch?" hollers the Greek. "That double-crossin' welcher——"

"That'll be all o' that," says Frieda. "I'm pretty

fond o' Butch, an' you might as well know it. An' you better not recite no poetry about it, neither."

"I'll——"

"No, you won't," she says. "Don't go barkin' around him or he'll put you were he put the Gashouse Kid, you——" an' she slaps her hand over her mouth as Gene starts a step, then stops, then pulls aside an' says:

"You kin go, Frieda," an' he holds open the door for her.

"Good-night, an' I hope you like your grub. You'll find some beer on ice, an' don't forget to put the cat out, Gene, dear," says the Swede, which was her idea 'o' comedy, an' she breezes past him an' slams the door f'm the outside.

That night a gat barks twice over in the far end o' the ward an' the newspapers has another o' them front-page stories about a gunman mysteriously settled—Butch Conway is found dead an' nobody knows how it happened.

Next day Gene the Greek goes to the Gashouse Kid's flat an' he taps the widow on the shoulder an' she looks up an' he drops twenny-eight hundred an' seventy-four dollars an' sevenny cents in her lap.

"Here's a little pot the boys kittied out for you," says the Greek.

XVI

PICS



XVI

PICS

MANY years ago, in a distant city, on a dark night, and without the knowledge of the police, the Play-plumbers and Scenario-scissorers of a great nation met in executive session to solve a weighty issue.

The public had demanded crook plays. The party to play opposite the crook, in order that justice might be served and the way of the transgressor be made as hard as possible, was always a rude, flat-footed bull, who slipped bracelets on the wrists of the evil genius and made final exit with this line: "I'll send you down for twenty years for this, Mr. Rat."

It was not a nice speech. But what could one expect from a dick who wore a celluloid collar?

So the playwrights of the stage and screen pondered and pondered, and were at a severe loss until a prominent Melodrama-malefactor arose and suggested the private detective. The meeting then adjourned.

The gentleman private detective was worked thin. He spoke like a gent; but the public always said it was fishy, because the public had its own private opinion of private detectives.

So the playwrights again convened, and said this thing must stop. They needed some one with a white man's vocabulary, yet with some shadow of authority. A fat Farce-fitter arose:

"Fellow yeggs," he panted, "I rise to nominate one who, though frequently pooh-poohed, is nevertheless ducksoup for this situation—the star-bearing but college-educated hybrid, the publico-private chimera, the newspaper reporter."

They leaped up and kissed him—and adjourned.

And thus was born that preponderant dramatic figure, the catch-as-catch-can, all-around, versatile hero, avenger, arm of the law, dealer of syntactical justice, typewriting terror of the terrible. In every four-acter, in each five-reeler, he drew a healthy salary. The people took to him and swallowed him with the salt of the situation and the pepper of his own lingo. The scene of the confession, the dénouement, and the consternation was moved from a grim cell and a third degree to a mahogany office of a managing editor.

But even this began to grow suspicious in time. Curious patrons of the arts up and wished to know how it came about that reporters were such wild-fire deliverers when dramatized or projected, and showed such punk results in the native columns of their own papers, a most natural place for revealment of their extraordinary talents.

So the weary Plot-planners reassembled, far from the hick mining-stock camp where the fictitious reporters had been written, and pooled their woes and searched the faces of one another and sighed. And there rose up one weasel-eyed Play-plumber and said:

“Brother inmates, the star reporter has been a viper in our bosoms. We have made him somebody, and he has turned out a bloomer because he cannot live up to our specifications in the sordid realism of daily life on the live daily. I propose, therefore, that we create a character, a character who does not exist, and cannot, therefore, arise to do a Frankenstein. I nominate without fear of successful contradiction——”

They strained forward and cried, “Hear, hear!”

“The lady or girl reporter!”

They smothered him with emotional embraces—and adjourned.

And there rushed in upon the play market a fiction-fathered female, who, protecting justice and virtue, swung right and left with her sex and her beauty and super-earthly endowments of courage and perspicacity, bearded the crooked senator, cancelled the mortgage on the little home, elected the handsome juvenile as mayor, and married him for a curtain. And the fagged aisle-seater clapped and was pleased.

Among those who took in the new dramas with the new fixers were the editors of newspapers. To them it was a suggestion, a new thought. So they set out to hunt girls for their staffs like the girls in the plays. And they have been hunting ever since. And they have found them with the same readiness with which the rich man galloped through the eye of the needle.

And to this day the hunt is on. But it is now a good bet that the all-heroine girl reporter is a dodo or a blue bird in actual existence, for she fails to be with us.

I have seen many women reporters come hopefully and go indignantly. Since it became noised that thirty dollars a week awaited the perfect feminine journalist, every girl who isn't trying to enter a chorus, register in a movie, or marry young, has

sought to report. Now and then one is the daughter of somebody and is wished on the staff. She buys mannish boots and makes ready to interview the nurses who handle crippled children when the town wants to know who's elected; she suggests that the lady's name in the divorce case be suppressed because the lady cried—she saw her cry; she wants an armed escort to take her home after dark when all the armed escorts are writing murders or finance.

For a while she draws pay and disagrees with the policy of the paper. But she never lasts. In hundreds of tries I have known two girls who made good as reporters—and surprised and grateful editors married them on the spot and retired them before they blew up. They haven't that divining sense of values; powdered noses can't smell news.

But, since the system has planted itself, and girls seek the jobs who cannot always be turned down, there is one specialty to which an ambitious girl can apply herself on a newspaper and draw something besides *ex post facto* profanity. She can bring in photographs—she can if her name is Miss Jessie James. Before she is on the first column of her first story she is climbing down a column from a second-story, with a photograph—for the fourth estate.

Take a look at your favorite sheet. How many pictures are there? Oh, twenty. Where do they come from? When a party kills her good man, I suppose she mails a cabinet sitting of herself to each paper before she drinks the acid and falls across his dear remains. When a lady elopes, she leaves a note to Mamma and a picture postcard addressed to each city editor—yes, she does!

Pictures have to be gotten. And they have to be gotten quickly. And they have to be gotten whether they can be gotten or not gotten. They don't come out to meet you. The kind of pictures that newspapers can get easily is the kind they don't want—hardly. Pictures occupy a lot of space in a modern daily. And getting them is a science, a profession, a vocation.

And as a "picture-chaser"—the universal title that goes with the office in every local room—the female sniper is sometimes the sharpshooting sister.

So, when somebody's niece with ambitions to sound the tocsin of a better era for the many gets on the pay roll through the man higher up, the city editor apologizes to the assistant city editor, pokes a thumb back over his shoulder toward the good dress-maker gone wrong, and whispers:

"Pics."

Pics are pictures—photographs—likenesses—reproductions—portraits. The cryptic monosyllable means worlds for the young woman who is standing hard by, biting the pencil which she has sharpened, and which, alas, is not to be her tool. She would have done better had she sharpened a jimmy. In preparation for journalism she has nibbled at rhetoric; she has probed into metaphysics; she has held hands with the Pythagorean theorem, rehearsed shorthand, and read the life of Horace Greeley. For this she is about to become a burglar, a beggar, a messenger, a green-goods pusher, a shoplifter—maybe a ghoul.

It isn't overdrawn. I was an assistant city editor once. I sent women after pictures and we printed them. And if the pages of a newspaper could tell stories! . . . However, I wasn't any better than the rest; I couldn't have been much worse.

In my capacity on a fast metropolitan shriek with a circulation of half a million a day, cut up by a dozen editions between the first market reports and the ninth inning, I ran the legs off many a picture-chaser so fast her conscience couldn't catch her. I was accessory before the fact to many a daylight misdemeanor. I was a martinet—but I made many a

reporter. It is the West Point of the commissioned officer of the press, this unpretty business of snaking photographs. Some of my chasers have passed me in the race since; one lived to roast my favorite play in New York, and call its author a "person."

You may have noticed in the all-star casts that a girl always plays the part of Oliver Twist. For some kinds of picture jobs girls are more effective. They get in more easily and get thrown out less frequently.

When a new member of no former service under fire joins the camp, the journalistic parallels of blanket-tossing are evoked to show the rookie a rousing welcome and teach him his place. It is customary to send a new reporter to the zoo to report progress on the expected arrival of the papal bull; or to send him on a flying assignment to the corner of two streets which run the same way; or have him call up the archbishop's residence by number hastily slipped into his hand to ask for "Jimmy Ryan," if the dignitary's name be the Rt. Rev. James Aloysius Ryan—and suchlike.

These ill-mannered and irreverent and probably cruel jests are spared the cubesses. The assignment man, with a look of grown-up resignation such as he would carry if he were taking his grandmother to a

football game or teaching his brother's baby how to do long division, instructs her gravely in every minute detail, explaining as much of the ethics and psychology of it as he thinks she can digest, and mixing with that the roughneck facts which she must swallow.

So, if you bear all that in mind, you may reverse with me to the time when I was that assistant city editor and when this story happened, which I have always since known I should write some day.

She was just out of college. Her teacher in English 12 had told her that she would make her mark in constructive journalism—her penmanship was excellent and she had a perfectly cultivated art of never splitting infinitives, something no collegiate alumna would be guilty of ever doing. So she went to her oldest brother except one, whom the owner of my paper had for a year been trying to beat at golf, but couldn't, and unbosomed her call. She showed him her thesis on "A Journey to a Suburb—an Exercise in Powers of Observation," and he liked it. He recognized the suburb, as he owned lots there. So he let the boss beat him two strokes, and the next day his sister sat nervously on the bench, waiting to be told the subject of her first editorial, though

she had a few pet subjects of her own that she intended to speak about.

I had to keep her waiting a little over two hours, poor child. She had elected 2 P. M. to enter. On an afternoon paper 2 P. M. is just between the explosion and counting the dead.


All I had to do between then and 4 P. M. was to answer four telephones twice a minute per, check up on each of twenty-two facts under inquiry for each of thirty-three stories coming in from forty-four reporters, edit copy at the rate of three hundred words the minute, keep the stuff coming out of all the typewriters by deadline, fire a boy, find out that the man who was about to be divorced in our columns as "a trick diver" was only "a truck driver"; save a society paragraph about a function at 10 East Columbus Street, the blue-book section, from getting into print at 10 West Columbus Avenue, the black belt; read the other seven afternoon papers to see that we weren't left on any infinitesimal molecule of news in any of the two hundred and sixty-three city stories, and tell a club woman who called up that we didn't usually settle arguments over the 'phone, but that to the best of my knowledge Elsie Janis was not engaged to De Wolf Hopper.

The new attaché, when I finally sent a boy to command her presence, after the Penultimate Final had been put to bed and only three of the telephones were now ringing, catacornered over with an expression that was to advise me she was not accustomed to such treatment. I motioned her to sit, talked in two of the 'phones at once—it's easy, a receiver to each ear—and addressed her at the same time, while copying from the day's schedule the still breathing assignments as a nucleus for the next day's grind.

"Lady," said I—always a gentleman, though on a successful paper—"I have no doubt that you have come here with many original ideas. And, though I have no time to listen to them, I grant you they are good ideas.

"But, while this is a progressive institution and bright and novel thoughts are the diamonds of our diadem, we have found that we get the best results by developing our new talent through a regular and unvaried routine.

"Your choice of work most probably would lie along lines of dramatic criticism or talks to unfortunate girls about to become mothers. But we have a dramatic critic, and the less said to those girls the



better. So, for the time being, your functions on the staff will embrace the all-important, most particular job of going out after photographs."

"Photographs!"

"Oh, well, then, let us call them pictures—pics—saves time. Now, I know that this is a bit of a surprise to you. It is to every beginner. Yes, I know you are not really a beginner, that you have had scholastic preparation. Newspapers should be operated on academic principles; but I want to tell you a little secret. The man who owns this paper bought it because it pays 11 per cent. on the investment. So we have to print advertising. To get advertising we have to have circulation. To pull circulation we need—what? Ah—don't say it. Permit me. We need pics!

"So, you see, the very heart's blood of the paper, its influence, its mighty tidal force, its 11 per cent., devolve upon your slender shoulders from this moment on."

She looked at me a bit dizzily. It was the old work. She didn't know whether to take me seriously and beat it, or play me for a lunatic and yell for help. Before she had found the logarithm——

"Because you are a girl," said I, "I shall spare you

needless and painful experimenting and shall give you, in a few rambling comments, the key, the code, the decalogue, the concordance, the who's why, the ladies' guide, and the thumbnail nutshell log to the complicated and highly specialized pilgrimage after the elusive photograph.

"Hundreds of men and women, through indescribable hardships—the pioneers of primitive picture-chasing—have sounded the depths of the craft, have found its fallacies, have tracked its trickeries, have mapped its mirages, have standardized its situations; they have worked out to its finest subtleties the habits of the animal and all its young, and invented after a ponderous process of elimination a series of steel traps that deliver the goods, bleating, at the feet of the engraving-room foreman.

"All this invaluable wisdom, the gleanings of the genius of generations of picture-chasers and their children's children, I am about to impart to you at the cost of but a few minutes, not counting the two hours you waited."

She was gone. Her chin was higher than the back of her neck, toward me, to drink in these mystic secrets of a subject concerning which, five minutes before, she had never even dreamed. She was gone,

but she was still there. She was gone, but she didn't know it.

"The fundamental psychology of this elevated art lies in the baffling discovery that the people whose pictures are most desired at any specific time are just the people who do not desire that their pictures be procured at that specific time. Scan the important local news of to-day, or any day—tragedies, domestic disasters, breaches of promise, graft, exposure, romance—all unsavory topics. It is unfortunate, but human beings are so constituted that all they want to know about their neighbors is the worst. And they want the worst illustrated. They not only want to know about the grass widow who eloped with her chauffeur, but they want to see her. They want to see why the chauffeur eloped with her. Her mother will have her photographs. Her mother will be the only woman in town without a curiosity to see those photographs. Her mother will fight the whole world to see that no paper gets those photographs, whereas a week ago she would have paid to have them printed in connection with a charity bazaar, when no newspaper wanted to print them, and nobody wanted to look at them if one had.

"In view of this deplorable clash of interests, it

has been necessary to induce, create, achieve various maneuvers—by subterfuge, brass knuckles, or stratagem—to get the picture by means other than frankly stating that the city editor would like to have one.

“These methods range from weeping upon the already aching breast of the next of kin for purposes of exciting sympathy, to high-class safe-blowing, refined housebreaking, or a bit of chloroform, scientifically administered. Do not misunderstand me: violence is not always necessary, and murder, especially, is to be approached only after full realization that the circumstances are extreme and the picture is for the front page.”

She hung on my every word. Her eyes said, “Yes, yes—go on!”

“Anyway—get the picture! That is the crowning answer. While I again observe that we frown upon wanton shedding of blood, always remember that you have a powerful newspaper behind you, and you need fear nothing. And don’t come in and tell us how you got it. If you don’t get it we may ask some questions. If you do we have no time to listen.

“A housemaid is very often susceptible, not sharing the timely pain and sudden secretiveness of relatives, and having an indigenous itch for one dollar

in hand paid; so it is often well to attack the castle from the servants' drawbridge. Maybe you can get into the house as a census-taker, and, discovering the picture, find a chance to poach it. If the chance is slim, throw a fit, and while the charitable lady runs to get you a glass of water, hook the photo and jump out of the window.

"Photographers are not supposed to sell private individuals' prints, but some of them are unethical; and while we regret this, we cannot make them over, and would accept a photograph thus treasonably given over, and could even be induced to credit the traitorous photographer.

"Another excellent flank movement which has registered high results, is to suggest that if you could take that beautiful portrait to the office and show it to the city editor, one look at those benign, fragile features would convince him that he shouldn't print the scandalous story at all.

"Anyway—get the picture! To illustrate my earnest sincerity in this incontrovertible principle, may I tell you modestly of an accomplishment of my own, when I was but a struggling picture-chaser?"

Could I?

"For three days I had been trying to get a likeness

of the wife of a prominent sheep-shearing-machinery manufacturer who had precipitately departed for Japan with the son of a nearby glass blower—the wife, not the manufacturer. The house was in charge of a faithful servant, impervious to bribes, deaf to diplomacy, with no feeling for artistic illustrations. The flying squadron of every picture-chasing fleet of every picture-printing sheet besieged, stormed, bombarded that lone castle with its garrison of one old housekeeper. And how she stood the gaff! She disconnected the doorbell. She locked all the doors. She took the receiver off the hook. She clamped the windows—it was an outrageous case.

“A rival paper finally executed a simultaneous front-and-rear assault. One reporter threw a brick through the front window, bringing the female Davy Crockett to that end, while another reporter chiselled a back window, broke in through the kitchen, got to the living-room, tore a life-size painting in a gold frame off the wall, and scooted out down an alley. I saw him run. He was fat. I was young and athletic. I caught him cross lots, walloped him on the chin, tore the masterpiece from his still conscious fingers, and, with eight picture-chasers chasing me

and the picture, managed to make a street car and staggered, panting, with my offering, to the very desk where now I sit, an executive!"

She would have married me if I had spoken then.

"You see, I got the picture. That is the feature of the anecdote.

"Now, having given you in a few succinct sentences the composite, the nub of the bitter experimenting of the foremost researchers in the alchemy of gilt-edge picture producing, I shall ask you to——"

I glanced down at my schedule.

"To go to this address——"

I wrote the street and number on a slip of paper and pushed it into her hungry hands.

"And get a picture of Beatrice Blaha, who has advertised for her lost dog."

"Yes, sir," said she. "But suppose she does not wish to give me a picture!"

XVII
ANNYE'S MA



XVII

ANNYE'S MA

THE genesis of the property man is an abysmal mystery, not only to you outsiders who pay to see a show, but to us insiders who would pay not to.

The acrobat is a hardy flower, planted in the *Turner Halle*, nurtured through visible night rehearsals and developed to florescence with the purchase of three suits of green tights and one handkerchief; the manager is born (Omaha or Odessa) and butterflies into winged bloom by the warmth of the copper's club chasing a scalper off the sidewalks; the actor, who is also of the theatre, has no graduated progress into the maturity of being, but naïvely insists that he can act—and there are not enough managers to convince one actor; the stage carpenter has driven a nail; the scene-shifter has driven a truck; the box-office man was a royal admiral in a past existence, and has the sea-going attributes of a pirate with a salt-water contempt for a landsman

flying two dollars; the usher has tried on a uniform and it fits him; the press agent is a raucous liar—it's a gift.

But in what obscure incubator is fledged that versatile egg with a round head, that general specialist, that jerry to all trades, that blundering bonehead boob, the property man?

He is called many names, but he never has one. He is Props. Be he young or tall, be he middle-aged or married, be he Presbyterian or vegetarian, he is never more than two things—Props and a good union man. He must be one to be the other. So he is both. Even that doesn't make him well balanced.

Be it known to all men that if Props wanted to work no one man could contain him. It would be an interesting experiment if a property man who wanted to work ever arose. There would be no limit to what he could do if the union didn't get wind of it and interfere. However, this is about vaudeville, not chimeras. Yet, vaudeville is itself a bit of a chimera—fifteen minutes of Melba, sixteen minutes of the Musical Walri (more than one musical walrus), and a week to get over both. Any business that can use on even terms a Guinea singer and a Guinea pig is, shall be, must be, a chimera—or what have you?

The vaudeville trouser is an impecunious dog. He carries nothing but a stick of No. 11 cheek-bone ochre, a deed to a square mile on Long Island, and resentment against the booking agent. For everything else he uses he writes ahead. That document is known as a Property Plot. It comes, postage due, to the stage carpenter, who leaves it where the property man will find it if he looks there. In that event Props will read it if he is in the humor. It will inform him of what the turn that sent the plot will require a week from the following Monday in order to give a performance. Every item in the plot is a "prop." An artificial pansy may be a prop; two horses may be two props. The range of props is from a roulette wheel to a rosary; from a baby to a bolo; from an aeroplane to a telegraph blank—anything can be a prop except a conscience or your great aunt.

All these articles are stipulated by commercial nomenclature and special qualifications suggested by the atmosphere, the subtleties or the imbecilities of the act. No forty theatres could have one-tenth the things called for in any plot. What the house does eventually supply, if Props is sober and got a tip last time the act performed there, is usually borrowed.

The manager equips him with a block of passes, which he gives to clerks in furniture stores for the use of Louis XIV settees, to antique dealers for the use of the battle-axe of chivalry, to the bartender across the street for four fingers, or to the cut-rate ticket shaver for ten cents on the dollar.

By Monday morning, when the talent oozes in, he has collected a pitiful little heap of miscellaneous rubbish, so that if he has not procured a tabouret for the magician's gold-fish bowl he can at least offer him an icebox or a rocking chair. In addition, he has brewed the liquid factors of our arts—weak tea for wine, strong tea for whiskey. His thunder sheet hangs ready to let loose the wrath of the heavens, and in the left pocket of this overalled Aladdin rest the instrumental gurgle of the nightingale and the hoarse coo of the artificial jackass. Ring up the curtain, the show will now go on.

Monday morning is a period of petulance, lament, blasphemy, and frenzied preparation about a vaudeville house, which need not be here detailed, as DeQuincey, the well-known hophead, told all there is to say about panic and overnight jumps in "The Flight of a Tartar Tribe." The orchestra leader is puffing to get harmony between the tall soprano and

the baritone comic, but they are married; the headliner is explaining to the carpenter where he is all wrong, all wrong; trunks are banging in, and the juggler is telling the oboe-blower how, when he played in Austria—well, it was all different; the trained mongooses are taking exercises and the untrained contralto is taking cold because the alley door must stay open to let in the English ventriloquist's luggage and the American dancer's baggage.

Props, a string-faked banjo between his teeth, a stuffed owl in his left hand and a statue of Cupid in his right, is strolling lethargically toward the dressing-room of the monologist, to make plain that hams must smoke their own cigars, these being perishable props and therefore not plottable.

When all the acts have disorganized the orchestra, informed the manager that under no consideration will they go on because their names are displayed outside the theatre in type of ignominious and insulting dimensions, set up their sweethearts' photographs on their dressing-tables and mailed themselves last week's salary in a money order addressed to a secret post-office box in New York, they engage in that amiable pastime known as catch-the-property-man. He is elusive but is eventually cornered. All

the ten acts, represented each by a committee of from one soubrette to nine men, demand simultaneously to know "How about my props?", Whereupon he, having a rich disregard for actors and others lower than he in the profession, tells them: "Yez sent in your prope'ty plots, didn't yez? All right. Them props'll be there before yez get there. On yer way."

In the theatre which this story is about to single out, the property man was above and beyond the average. How he had become a property man, why he had become a property man, even when he had become a property man, nobody knew. The manager of the theatre had found him there. He went with the lease. The union, not the management, assigns property men.

He requisitioned his passes weekly, and, since he rarely sold all of them, he was slightly more honest than most of them. He had been known to furnish an act with nearly everything it called for. And his props frequently got good notices from the critics, who called them "investitures." So when Hill & Dale, veteran vaudevillians, approached the theatre with their new sketch act, their hearts beat light and free.

Hill, who was the husband of Dale, a towering figure in his field, wrote the plot on hotel stationery, with which vaudeville actors are generous, and set out the desired properties, with which vaudeville actors are lavish. The plot, designed to serve the manager for his programing and "billing," the stage carpenter (sometimes called the stage manager) with his scene requirements, the leader with his musical order, and Props with the shopping list of stage notions, read as follows:

Those Nifty Artists

Wilbur—HILL & DALE—Annye

In their refined new vehicle

"A DAUGHTER'S DASTARDLY DEED"

(Pathetic sketch; two principals; 15½ min.)

OVERTURE: "Mother." Verse and chorus, vamp till entrance.

SCENE PLOT: Kitchen in 2; door CU, window LU, street backing.

PROP PLOT: 1 kitchen stove, shiny; 2 kitchen chairs, neat but not nobby; 1 kitchen table, four legs and drawer; 1 checkered tablecloth, fringed but not frayed; 1 rag carpet, not ragged; 1 stove poker; 1

small coal shovel and other stovical accessories, miscellany, etc.; 1 lithograph, Mary Pickford, Roosevelt, or selected subject, to relieve bareness of wall; 1 portrait middle-aged elderly lady, affectionate-looking, gray hair, neat frame.

(Stove DR; table C, with cloth on and chair at each end; litho on wall U, 6 feet from floor; photo old lady hung above door.)

In English all this meant that the scene was to be set to the depth of the second entrance ("in 2"), which contemplated that the back wall stand about eight feet from the curtain line. There are four entrances through the stationary wood wings, at intervals of four feet "up stage" or back from the proscenium. The capitalized symbols signify: C, centre; L, left; R, right; D, down; U, up. Down is toward the footlights, up is from the footlights. Left is the audience's right, stage markings being determined by the player's position as he faces the house.

Therefore, Hill & Dale wanted stock scenery, set to a depth of eight feet back of the outer curtain, portraying an atmospheric kitchen, with a stove to their left toward the audience, a clothed table in the

centre of the scene, a window behind them to their right, a homely chromo in the centre of the wall and a portrait of a benign, matronly woman hanging above the door behind them and slightly to their left. The orchestra instructions meant that the song, "Mother," played to the length of one verse and one trip through the chorus, would introduce them, and was to be continued in piano strain until the first appearance of one of the players through the entrance, when it was to stop abruptly without finishing out the measure.

Hill & Dale were in a far-off city when they sent in their comprehensive, ambitious, and optimistic account of what they would like to have and where they would like to have it. Props opened their letter in due form, and in due time ambled forth to see what he could do about it.

The theatre had a stove poker, so if he could find a stove to match it his heavy work would be finished, and he could stop at Jake's Place to help the bartender roast the current bill, which did not do justice to its props, as artistic a jumble of junk as had ever been gathered on a single stage. The life of a property man has many disappointments. He goes to huge efforts to procure a pickle jar, and finds that the wizard takes flags of all the warring nations out of

it, getting only a faint ripple, whereas if he threw it at his assistant it would be a scream.

Props found a stove. It was a fancy base-burner in its declension, and might have cost hundreds of dollars before people learned how to warm up a parlor. For a poverty-punished kitchen range it struck the inspired property detective as the last grasp. He issued a pass to the owner and conscientiously made entry in his little book as follows: "To 1 stove—7 passes." He couldn't find a rag carpet, but for only two passes he traded in the use of an imitation Oriental that wept aloud to Allah. He got a lithograph from a printer free—a bockbeer goat. It had been a cruel day's work.

Next day was just as tight. One of the other acts on the bill had specified a new auto tire. Props tried several cars, but found all the spares chained on, so he borrowed a wagon wheel. Another team called for Vassar pennants to deck a college-girl's dormitory scene. Pennants are pennants. So he got two marked "Cement Show" and six inscribed "Oklahoma." That killed the day. And day after day died just like that—something attempted, anything done, had earned repose at Jake's. And, since Hill & Dale were favorite headliners and it looked like a

big week to come, the market for passes was bullish and Props couldn't afford to waste any in satisfying the temperamental whims of hyperpunctilious hams.

Monday morning dawned dismal and sloppy. The troubadours poured in dripping and sore. A couple of trains were late, a couple of trunks were lost, the strong man hadn't slept well, the sister-act couldn't book week after next, the trap-drummer had a cramp in his elbow, the manager had a hangover, the nearly human chimp had a baggage-car flea—it was a regular Monday morning in a regular vaudeville theatre.

Hill & Dale, lugging little Dale Hill, just old enough to be ornery and not old enough to make it a three-act, tumbled moistly into dressing-room A, threw their wraps on the zinc make-up table, and read their mail. Nothing in that mail has bearing on the events of this tale. But an incoming actor's mail cannot be hurdled. One must go around it or plow through it. It consists of nine announcements from Italian restaurants to the effect that spaghetti is a specialty, and professional trade is respectfully solicited; seven boarding-houses making known that rates obtain for the profession—airy rooms, elegant table; a dealer in second-hand costumes stating he

doesn't care when he is paid, it is a pleasure to deal with artists; suggestions from two theatrical papers that a drop of ink makes millions think; a request from the lady's brother to get him out on bail in a distant city where he was jobbed by the police, though innocent—it will never happen again if they pay his fine this last once; notice from the White Rats Actors' Union and Associated Actresses of the United States, Mexico, and Canada, that unless back dues are paid they cannot vote for High Chief Exalted Rodent; printed slip from the management that the word "damn" must not be used "during" performance, as this theatre caters exclusively to ladies and gentlemen—also, don't take dressing-room keys out of theatre.

The little fellow was asleep on a trunk by the time these diverse documents had been discussed and digested, and the headliners strode to the centre of the stage to demand an accounting, punish the guilty, and make each plebeian actor know his place. From billboard type to stage-door salute, the headliner demands preferment and "reco'nition." He is a martinet on and a snob off. If business is good he crows; if it is light he asks you what can you expect from such a soused manager and such a pinhead press

agent. He wants plenty of room to swell himself, plenty of air when he unbelts to the stage carpenter, and plenty of attention when he tells the leader that the slide tombone is too *forte*. Even when not wearing his fur coat he insists on obeisance and genuflection.

So, when Hill talked down to and Dale piped up at the crew, none said them nay. The scenery was let down. Hill tossed it a look with the slant of an eye and said it was rotten but it would do. The electrician leaped for the marble board and juggled switches at Hill's command until he had just the right formula blending whites, reds, and ambers in the footlights with two open floods of green from the wings to effulge the spirit of a kitchen at eventide. Then Hill went to it with the director, complaining with wringed hands that while the theme of the overture was an apostrophe to Mother, the drummer lit on it as though it were a holler to Mother-in-Law. The matter was compromised.

Now Hill turned himself to the real business of the transaction. Where was Props? Where the—ah, there was Props. Hill rushed him.

"How about it—our stuff—where?"

"Don't git noisy," said Props. "Vaudeville

headliners ain' nothin' in my young life. Youse ain't the first act what plays this joint an' there'll be a hull lot more after youse is back on the split-week time where youse come from—so don't git noisy. Now, what is it youse want?"

"Why—we wrote——"

"I know. I know."

"We called for——"

"I know what you called for. What you wanna know is what you get. There's the stove. I know it ain't no kitchen stove. But that stove could go in a kitchen. It's a poor kitchen, ain' it? Well, poor people takes what they gets. That there's the table. Them is the chairs. Don't kick about them chairs. Some o' the best acts in vaudeville has used them chairs—an' they wasn' no kitchen acts, neither. There's your litho an' your tablecloth an' your poker. An' if that ain't the swellest lookin' carpet what ever goes in a kitchen you can win a bet."

And he hitched his overalls and started UC.

"Hey!" shrieked Hill. "Wait a minute! The picture! That crayon enlargement! The portrait! The life-size face of the old lady—the motherly old lady—the one what goes over the up-stage door—the framed one—the picture—the motherly old——"

Props turned.

"Say. Where d'you get that hollerin' all over the stage? You got a stove, didn't you? You can't beat them chairs, can you? What do you want? Everything?"

"But, my dear fellow—that portrait is in the act. It's got to be there. It's her dead mother. I bawl her out and I point to the picture—the enlarged picture of her dead mother. She gets ashamed of herself and she turns straight. It's got to be there. She can't turn straight without a picture of her dead mother, can she?"

"H'm," said Props. "I never thought o' that. She couldn' use a picher of her dead father, could she? I got a picher of a old man. Her father is just as good. I——"

Hill rumbled his fingers through his pompadour.

"Good heavens, man, no! The mother is in the script. The mother is in the plot! And the mother was in the property plot. Nothing else can go. I got to have a life-size mother—I mean a life-size lady—I mean the face of a life-size—oh, you know what I mean! And you got to get it. And have it up there over that up-stage door—the picture of a sweet, motherly, kind, good-natured, old dead lady."

"All right, all right," said Props. "If you're gonna split hairs, all right. It's pretty late now, but I'll get it. I'd 'a' had it there in the first place if I thought you wanted it. Half o' the stuff youse actors puts on them prope'ty plots is put there jus' to see if I'm nutty enough to go out an' get it. So can the riot. I'll have it—hangin' over that door. Is that good enough?"

It was. Hill, muttering about the stupidity of property men, went to his room to unpack. Props, stuttering about the gluttony of pedantic players (fussy bushers) for inconsequential minutiae, went forth.

Props was in a bit of a pickle. He had been caught short in the pass drive of an active bourse and sold out to the bottom slip. No passes, no picture. But he bethought him of Mrs. Lloyd, who kept a theatrical boarding house around the corner. Props sent her an occasional patron, so she should be friendly. And, as he remembered it, there was a picture hanging in her parlor that would fill the Hill bill. Mrs. Lloyd had once been a wardrobe woman herself, so she would understand. In a pinch he could appeal to her professional patriotism by picturing the dire emergency.

Props rang the bell, but no one answered. He tried the door, it opened. He walked in, looked about, no one was downstairs. He could see the picture. Just what he wanted—life-size, lifelike, blown-up photo of an elderly matron with a double chin, framed, glassed, wired. In a minute and a half Props was out of that door with that picture. He could explain later. He was in a hurry.

The show was on. The acrobats had taken their nine bows and pointed to each other; the sister team had sung "Jerusalem" in ragtime; the uncanny chimpanzee had undressed and gone to bed in full view of the matinee; the blackface had discussed Ford, Bryan, Wilson, short skirts, neutrality, and McGraw; the Russian ballet from Battle Creek had warmed up the house; the World's Only Left-handed Whistler, amid tremendous enthusiasm, had done the Star-Spangled Banner while the kitchen for Hill & Dale was being set. Props hung the picture, gave the *tout ensemble* the see-saw—O. K.

Everything was where it belonged when the orchestra ripped into the intro. Up went the curtain, and through the centre door came Miss Dale; her face death-green, her eyes doped, dressed in tatters, and reeling like a rag she staggered in. Her hand

touched a dummy button on the wall, and the foot-lights, the wing lights, the spot lights, and the border lights sprang into life almost simultaneously, discovering Hill on one of the chairs, his head in despair upon his limp arms, as though he had sat through a gruelling vigil and fallen into a merciful sleep. The lights startled him. He arose shakily. The pallid, cadaverous woman started toward him as though in pleading, then sank back as though in fearsome shame—her celebrated characterization, the wife who had sinned.

“Don’t hit me, Jim!” she cried. “It’s been a bitter night. I’m soaked to muh very bones. But I couldn’t stand it no longer. So I come back to you. My heart was burnin’, Jim. So I come out in the storm. A dog wouldn’t of come out on a night like this.”

Hill pulled himself up and together. His splintering fist came crashing down upon the board. He kicked the chair out from behind him and strode around the table. He seized her wrist.

“Where’ve you been, Sal?” he barked hoarsely. “Tell me, girl—where’ve you been? With—him?”

She fell into a fit of consumptive coughing. His fist unfolded. He looked at her, arm’s length. His anger died.

"Why—girl—you're sick! You're——"

"Yes, Jim," she wailed. "I'm dyin'. It's been a-comin' a long time. And to-night's storm is the finish, I guess. I knew it. I wanted to come back to you, Jim, before I go away forever and—and ask you, Jim—ask you if you can forgive me."

"Forgive you, Sal? You've broke my heart—me what worshipped the ground you walked on, Sal. But I'll forgive you. It was wrong—but he tempted you, that monster in human shape! And I'll cut his heart out for this! Don't cry, my girl—I'll forgive you. Jim forgives you. There!"

And he folded her head in his mighty arms as she broke into another fit of bronchitis.

The hug lasted. Slowly she drew back her head.

"Now I can die in peace, Jim," said she. "It was all I wanted—for you, you what I wronged so basely, to say you forgive me and take me in those dear arms once again. Just that, Jim—and just one other thing."

"What is it, girl? Speak."

"To see my dear dead mother's picture once again!"

He stepped back, clutched the table with his right hand, and with a sweeping backward gesture of his left as he looked down to her, said huskily:

"Yes, Sal. Your ma was a plain woman, but a good woman. Many a time in them dark, maddening hours when I grew tired o' watching for you through that window, watchin' for my Sal what never came, I stood and gazed at them sweet, tender features o' the woman who put your hand in mine and says, 'Jim, be good to her,' she says. Yes, Sal, if she was alive this day her heart would be broke like mine is, but she would forgive you like I did. Look into them features, Sal. You'll find mercy there!"

She turned, raising her clasped hands in prayer above her head, and flung herself upon her knees at the threshold. She lifted her head and from her hacked throat came a wild cry: "Mother—oh, Mother——"

The cry froze there. . . .

She looked up into the placid features of that famous and favorite lady, the late Queen Victoria.



THE COUNTRY LIFE PRESS
GARDEN CITY, N. Y.

